

of iron or of gold

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/17721587) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/17721587>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Thor (Movies)
Relationship:	Loki/Thor (Marvel)
Additional Tags:	Jotunn Loki (Marvel) , Magical Bonds , King Thor , Enemies to Lovers , Other Additional Tags to Be Added , Asgard/Jotunheim Relations , Slow Burn , Single Sex Jotnar
Stats:	Published: 2019-02-10 Completed: 2019-04-01 Chapters: 21/21 Words: 41915

of iron or of gold

by [orphan_account](#)

Summary

“cage an eagle and it will bite at the wires, be they of iron or of gold.”

The relations between Asgard and his home aren't easily mended. It's impossible to cleanse an entire realm of that much bloodshed. If Loki can't save Jotunheim, perhaps he *can* save himself.

Notes

this fic is a continuation/fleshed out version of a concept from my 100 lifetimes. i really miss the challenge of writing daily, so i've plotted this out and will be updating every other day. please leave feedback and let me know what you think!

quote by henrik ibsen, *the vikings of helgeland*

prelude

Loki is born along the tail-end of the First War in the harshest cold and sealed away in the temple.

Too small.

Jotunheim is a harsh land of ice and frostbite, but still, he's born for it and from it. A blue babe on a frozen rock, swaddled in heavy enchantments while echoed cries from the battlefield sing him to sleep.

He's four-hundred years old when the horn bellows, signaling the end.

They've lost, Jotunheim has fallen; he knows before the march of the wounded, carrying fallen Jotnar, reach the palace. Loki's heard whispers of surrender— but, his father is a proud king. He can't imagine it will be that easy.

The halls are alive in a way they haven't been for months. Loki, small in stature, is nearly trampled trying to reach his brother. He's almost to the front gate when Loki finally grabs ahold of the fur draped over his shoulders.

“Brother,” Loki starts, but Helblindi silences him with a large hand thrown to the side. His brows crease with worry, and lips draw into a thin line. Something is wrong, and Loki's stomach flips at the thought of what.

No. Surrender was never viable in the father's eyes. Which meant—

Loki sucks in a gasp and clenches tight to Helblindi's cloak. The hand that had silenced him moves to cup the back of his neck, cradling the entirety of his head in the process. Loki lets himself be pulled closer, finding safety beneath his brother. Together they watch the warriors march in, leaving trails of blood in the snow.

“Is father—?” Loki's query is cut short when in the shadowy mist of silhouettes, he spots King Laufey, a giant towering over other giants. Colossal, regal, strong, and very much alive. Relief blossoms in Loki's chest; he'd thought the worst, he always did.

His father looks sordid, but that's to be expected. He wasn't one to take defeat lightly, especially at the hands of Aesir beasts. That's when Loki notices his empty hands.

The Casket is gone.

More so than that, there is an empty spot to his left.

Loki feels his brother shaking, and the protective hand at the back of his head moves to form a trembling fist. When he looks up, Loki can see his red eyes glistening.

“Helblindi,” Loki whispers, tugs at the hem of the fur cloak once more. “Where is Býleistr?”

He gets no answer, and Loki is forced to tear his gaze away and back to his father’s army marching ever closer. Prince Býleistr is missing, a gaping hole at King Laufey’s side. Loki sees now how all the warriors hang their head.

“Býleistr?” Loki calls out.

Where is his eldest brother? He’d only seen him six months ago, when he led a small troop to the palace to resupply and to wish Loki an early birthday, bringing him a fire opal ring forged from a village where they’d set up camp.

He’d been fine then. He is fine. He’s there, in the crowd, probably helping to carry the dead.

“Býleistr!” Loki calls again, and this time attempts to run forward to meet the parade half-way. But Helblindi grabs him by the scruff of the neck and hauls him back. The closer their father gets, the blurrier they become, and Loki belatedly realizes it’s because his eyes are full of unshed tears.

“He’s gone,” Helblindi says from behind him, and he leans down on a massive knee, bends enough that Loki can reach to wrap his arms around his neck.

The pit within him grows, threatening to swallow him whole. A piece of his heart chips away like ice.

Loki doesn’t cry as he stands in the front row of Jotnar, burning the body of their fallen prince. He shed as many tears as he could in the privacy of his bedchambers. He has none left to offer now.

The flames consume the body of Býleistr, and Loki watches. Impassive, but angry. Silent, but calculating.

They send Býleistr off in a blaze of glory.

King Laufey is different. The loss of his first born being nearly too much for him to hold.

Helblindi is given the title of Crown Prince and begins his training for the role. It's natural that Loki sees him less and less. The throne isn't something Helblindi ever wanted, and Loki hopes his

brother doesn't grow bitter at the burden placed on his head.

Loki doesn't want it either, not really. He isn't much for wanting things outside his grasp. Third son, or not, Jotunheim would never be ruled by a runt of his size.

And, with the Casket gone, the effort it takes to rule has double— tripled, even.

No, Loki is much more content to slink by in the shadows. Out of sight, out of mind. Free to come and go as he pleases with the protection of the royal name. He grows older with each passing winter, practicing his seidr until he's on equal footing with the elder weavers. Further, until he surpasses even them and is invited to train and wield his power alongside the warriors.

It's on those training grounds that King Laufey calls for him, interrupting his daily practice.

His father rarely does so these days, and Loki decides to keep the roll of his eyes hidden from the summoning guards.

What he could possibly want? Loki hasn't the faintest idea.

Senile in his old age, really.

The walk to the throne room is short—half of the corridors are closed off and boarded with impenetrable ice. The palace has diminished bit by bit since the removal of the Casket, a mere relic of its formal glory. Even the perch from where his father sits is cracked and crumbling.

He looks at home there, Loki thinks. Half-dead like the rest of Jotunheim.

"My King," Loki says with a bow. Laufey only watches him with faded red eyes. The gesture is entirely unnecessary for anything other than sarcasm.

Luckily for him, Laufey is too used to his nature to care.

"Helblindi takes the crown once my affairs are in order."

Ah, straight to the point then.

Loki snaps his mouth shut to hide the twitch. What affairs? He has done nothing but soften on the throne while their enemies thrived and Jotunheim died. There is no doubt he's taught Helblindi to follow suit. They all would perish.

"I will congratulate my brother the moment I see him," Loki says smoothly. The Crown Prince is nowhere in sight— Helblindi was just as tall as their father, a towering ten feet in height compared to Loki's six. "Where is the big brute?"

"That doesn't concern you," Laufey sighs. There's no malice, only defeat.

"What *does* concern me, father?"

As far as Loki can tell, nothing had concerned him in half a millennium.

"The Allfather has sent a raven."

Loki goes still, his skin clamming up, despite the perpetual cold. News from Asgard can't mean anything good. Hellacious, bloodthirsty beings— the lot of them. A raven from Odin would bring only destruction.

“His son, Prince Thor, takes the crown soon. They wish to negotiate a peace treaty.”

Loki snorts a laugh. “We have a peace treaty. We rot away while they bask in the glory of a golden shame.”

What did the Aesir know about peace? Better yet—

“And,” Loki adds, taking a careful step forward. “What does this have to do with me?”

“A treaty to reopen our borders, reopen trade. Perhaps with the right influence, Jotunheim can prosper again.”

There is something in the way he says it, a subliminal message rooted in his tone. Layers to the operation that he isn’t discussing, not yet at least.

“We will need an ambassador to negotiate with the newly crowned prince. Someone persuasive and clever,” his father says, eyeing him with a spark that Loki thought died long ago. “Someone small enough to navigate Asgard and all her corners properly.”

Oh.

Loki smiles something wicked, blue lips stretching back to reveal a mouth full of teeth.

“Shall we begin?”

act i.i

Chapter Summary

act one: the negotiations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Of all the tomes and histories detailing customs, culture, geography, *biology*, and etiquette— not one prepared him for the dry heat of Asgard.

Loki had been encouraged by an elder to use seidr to manipulate his skin. Make him peach instead of blue, tuck away his horns, and ease the red from his eyes. He pointedly ignores the advice and decides to keep his natural skin and all that accompanies it— all that makes him Jotun.

Plus, it's the only thing keeping him cool beneath his leathers, all tailored specifically for him to blend with high-society Asgardian fashion.

Loki stands in front of the full-length mirror in his chambers to assess his new wardrobe. The collar sits high on his throat, higher than he'd like. The top fits too snug, and with more fasteners than he'd like.

He doesn't *like* any of this.

And, he isn't used to seeing himself so covered up. He twists in his tunic, trying to alleviate the stiffness of the fabric to no avail. How did the Aesir battle in these garments? They're so restricting. Loki takes hold of the stitched leather cummerbund and removes it entirely. His stomach instantly cools to the touch of fresh air. He inhales deep, relief.

Maybe he'll start a trend.

It's a small respite that he's at least he is able to keep his hair groomed in true Jotnar fashion. His dark curls have been soothed with seidr and the sides braided back to the length of it. He's seen the intricate knots and loop-work of the Aesir maidens. How their hair didn't break off and tangle, he'll never know.

A knock on the door interrupts his primping, and a wiry man enters with a scroll. Loki stops fiddling with his sleeve long enough to shoot him a withering look.

"Prince Loki—"

"Ambassador is fine," Loki says. It's what he is, after all. He would rather attend the council meetings, not garden parties. The page only clears his voice at the correction, pressed to continue.

"Your Majesty requests your presence in the throne room."

Loki nods and turns back to the mirror, resuming the insistent fidgeting with his clothing. It's a dismissal, and it works. And soon enough he's alone with thoughts of Thor.

It was perhaps his most intense area of study, mandatory that he be prepared in his dealings with the King of Asgard. Thor is close to his own age, if not a bit older— was a child, like himself, when the war was won. However, unlike Loki, Thor didn't see a brother come back lifeless and stiff. He is an only child, the sole heir. A child of thunder, and wielder of Mjolnir.

That's the official account. Loki gleams a lot more of who Thor really is by stories told in seedy taverns littered among the nine realms.

Reckless, cheeky, arrogant, charming— to name *very* few.

Brash, Loki suspects, without an ounce of discipline. A boy, at heart, thrust onto the throne before he's prepared to rule. The more whispers Loki had collected, the more his confidence grew. Now he plays the waiting game for the perfect opportunity to strike.

The rest of the palace is just as gold and gaudy as his chambers. Loki keeps his head forward as they make their way down the halls. Every step is a reminder of what Jotunheim has lost, he barely remembers the day when his home stood as grand as this.

He'll watch it burn. Every pillar and arch will be reduced to molten gold.

That thought is the only thing that keeps the carefully practiced smile into place as he approaches the throne. Atop Hlidskjalf sits the Thor, King of Asgard, a lot less formidable than his predecessor. It takes a great deal of patience for Loki not to wager war here and now. He could summon a blade and shove it through Thor's eye before any of them could blink.

Loki clenches his fist to stop himself. It's a tempting scenario, but one that would ruin everything.

"Prince Loki," Thor bellows and stands to bow, eyes catching on Loki. He falters, choking on his words. Loki tilts his head, follows Thor's line of sight to his bare midriff. When he looks back up, Thor's cheeks are red, but he's regained his composure. "Asgard welcomes you."

Loki doubts that very much.

"I am pleased to be in its company," Loki lies smoothly. Practice, he reminds himself.

Thor descends the staircase, stopping only once he reaches the bottom. He holds out a hand to Loki, and Loki stares at like it's a claw, before slipping his own into the grasp of rough fingers. Thor smiles and brings it to his lips, kissing the knuckles lightly. When he lets go, Loki lets his hand fall limply to his side.

King or not— Thor is dreaming if he thinks Loki's lips are to touch any part of him. He'd sooner see the gallows.

"I hope you had safe travels," Thor is saying, bringing Loki back to the task at hand. "And that you don't find Asgard too warm."

Loki covers his stomach with a strategically placed arm. He's used to the exposure, but he can feel Thor's eyes flirting down. Vulnerability isn't a sentiment he enjoys.

"Tepid," Loki tells him, all charm. "Nothing I can't handle, I assure you."

Thor grins wide, flashing his teeth, and crinkling his eyes. Blue, Loki notices— but it's unimportant.

"Walk with me," he says and holds out his arm. The Einherjar at the exit exchange a look that they don't realize Loki can see. Loki loops his arm through Thor's offered one, sending a smug smile their way.

They don't trust him. None of them do.

None but Thor, it seems.

So, Loki adds *fool* to the growing list of adjectives.

Thor takes him to the gardens. They are extravagant, much like the rest of the realm, overflowing with foliage and hearty blooms in a palate of colors unfamiliar to Jotunheim's icy landscape. He lets Loki set the pace and stops when he stops. On occasion, Thor offers insight on a particular flower that piques Loki's interest, but for the most part, their stroll is dotted with light chatter and comfortable silence.

And, when Thor turns his head upward, squinting at the sky, Loki notices something strange that he didn't before.

"Your hair," Loki states, rather dumbly.

"Oh." Thor reaches up to touch the fair strands, all woven back in the traditional Jotun manner. He ducks his head, almost shy. "I wanted you to feel at home."

Loki hums thoughtfully. "If that were the case, we should shave your head. Most Jotnar are bald."

Thor's eyes widen and Loki jostles his elbow lightly into his side. He could do it, with a flick of his wrist—rid Thor of that golden hair. He must know that too. But, that might put them at a worse start than stabbing him in the eye.

"You aren't bald," Thor says, a quick change of subject.

"I said *most*."

"You aren't like most," says Thor, a quiet observation. They've stopped their stroll, and he's looking upon Loki carefully. Like he's attempting to be strategic with his choice of words. "You're —"

“Small?” Loki offers, if only a bit snidely. Thor laughs and tugs at his arm, pulling him along once more. They’ve almost reached the palace again, and Loki knows from the itinerary given to him upon arrival, Thor will be busy most of the day.

“I was going to say beautiful.”

Loki stiffens, feels his cheeks purple against his will. His reports did say Thor was suave. A real romantic, always attempting to woo this maiden or that.

But Loki was no maiden.

He was something else entirely.

“I’m not here to court you.”

Though, these flirtations would certainly ease the way. If Thor is smitten, he can’t suspect. It’s a game after all, and Loki must play his hand accordingly.

Lucky for him, Thor takes no offense, only laughs under his breath. “No, you are here to negotiate an updated peace treaty.”

“Yes, Asgard-Jotunheim relations,” he reiterates, making sure the word *relations* comes out dripped in honey.

“Boring.”

“*Boring*,” Loki, for once, agrees. “But it doesn’t have to be.”

The loop around the garden ends, and they are once again back at the palace entry. Thor looks a bit flustered, and Loki praises himself for his successful attempt at flattery. He gently pulls himself away from Thor, smiling and turning to walk backward toward the wing that will take him to his chambers. This time, he doesn’t try to hide his exposed midriff.

“Thank you for your hospitality, my King.” Loki gives a small bow of his head, lips quirked into a suggestive smile. Teasing, for all intent.

Thor stands there, dumbstruck, before finally getting with the program. “Would you like to accompany me for dinner tonight?”

“It would be an honor,” Loki replies with a great deal of faux-sincerity, hand on his heart and all. He turns around and lets his smile curl into something much more sinister.

Chapter End Notes

thank you for all the feedback so far! don't hate loki too much, he's just a little bitter.

act i.ii

Loki grows antsy in the following weeks.

Thor is there to show him about the palace and Asgard, telling of all the rich history that Loki cares nothing about. Half of it he's already read anyway. But he keeps up his appearance and pretends to be interested, letting Thor drone on and on with never-ending enthusiasm.

Only once does Loki needle him about the location of Odin's vault, a subject that is quickly changed.

He takes his dinner with Thor more often than not. Every meal in Asgard is heavy and in abundance, something Loki isn't used to. He simply picks at an excessive pile of roast and smiles at Thor from across the table.

As far as meetings go, *that's* as far as he's gotten.

Loki brings it up when Thor is two goblets down of mead, looking flushed and a bit tired.

He wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and sets his cup down carefully. Thor's eyes dart back and forth, and Loki can practically hear the cogs turning in his head.

"When will we be sitting down with the Council to discuss our negotiations?" Loki repeats, knowing full well that Thor heard him the first time.

"You see," he starts, but Loki doesn't let him get far.

"I've been here for weeks. I can name every flower in the royal garden but can't tell you the terms needed to be met in order to reopen Jotunheim's borders." Loki can't help the bite that makes its way through his words. He's been cooped up too long in this cesspool, he can't be at fault for letting irritation slip through.

Luckily for him, Thor is close to drunk. He won't remember this in the morning.

"I have to do a great deal of convincing."

Loki quirks an eyebrow.

Oh, now that was interesting. Confusing, but interesting.

"Convincing?" Loki asks, feigning indifference. "What for?"

Thor's cheeks grow red, either from the alcohol or embarrassment. Loki can't be sure or pressed to care enough to find out.

"The Council isn't exactly thrilled you are here. I kind of," Thor trails off, ducking his head and rubbing the back of his neck. "I kind of orchestrated this whole thing without their consent."

Loki feels his eye twitch.

It's fine, really. The negotiations won't mean much in the end anyway. But this means there is probably an eye on him at all times.

The Jotun mage casting spells on their King.

“Oh,” says Loki. And that’s all.

“I was hoping when you arrived, they would change their mind.”

Loki picks up his glass and takes a sip of the sweet wine— perhaps one of the better aspects of Asgard. He paces himself though, this isn’t a place to let his guard down.

“I take it they didn’t?”

Thor shakes his head and slumps back in his chair, rubs a hand down the scruff of his face. “There is still tension with Jotunheim, I hope you understand.”

Beneath the table, Loki’s curls his hands into tight fists. His nails bite at his palms but the sting helps to temper the anger bubbling in his chest.

Loki *more* than understands.

“Of course,” he says instead of lashing out. “However, forgive me if I can’t understand why their reluctance is hindering our agreement.”

Thor looks up, breaks away from whatever mental state he had found himself in. “The approval of the Council is necessary to go forward, I’m afraid.”

The chair scrapes across the stone floor when Loki stands, he takes another sip of wine to calm his nerves and slowly makes his way across the dining table to stand behind Thor. He looks tense, so Loki slips his hands along his shoulders, hard with muscle, and kneads rhythmically.

Thor softens like snow, leaning into Loki’s touch and letting out a soft sigh.

Loki imagines scooting his hands just a little higher, wrapping his fingers around that thick throat and choking him until he’s blue in the face. It makes touching Thor much more tolerable. He leans down, lips ghosting along the shell of his ear, and hair falling in a dark cascade over his shoulder.

“You are king,” Loki tells him, and Thor shudders. “You don’t need approval.”

Two days later, there is a meeting scheduled to discuss Asgard-Jotunheim relations.

None look happy to see him there, save Thor, who stares with a hazy twinkle in his eyes. Loki can’t imagine the rumors this will stir— he knows what each of them thinks.

This was Loki’s persuasion and influence.

Well, he supposes they are right.

The meeting is long and tedious, but it gives his being there a real sense of purpose.

First, they discuss reopening the borders. Jotunheim has been closed off to the rest of the realms since the war. It’s a matter that hardly concerns Loki personally, for he knows all the cracks in Yggdrasil and travels with ease.

But, his people are suffering and going a bit stir crazy confined to a dying land.

Someone announces they will draw up a contract of regulations surrounding the issue and Loki politely agrees. It won't matter soon anyway.

By the time the meeting is adjourned, Loki's body is stiff with fatigue. Thor catches him as he stands and stretches, an irritating grin on his face.

"What?" Loki asks with one eye open, hands high above his head, and back arched. Loki prolongs the stretch for good measure, letting Thor get his fill. He's more pliant when flustered.

"You did great. I was sure that sharp tongue would have words with one of them."

Loki drops his hands and rolls his shoulders, a graceful movement that Thor tracks diligently. "I'll save my sharp tongue for other matters."

This close he can hear Thor audibly swallow. Loki would be lying if he said it didn't thrill him a bit.

Whatever reply, be it a jest or serious proposal, is cut off when a guard calls out for him. Thor snaps his mouth shut, closes his eyes and inhales deeply.

Flustered, indeed. Perhaps even something else.

He doesn't see Thor the rest of the day, or the day after that. It isn't until the sun has set low on the third that there is a knock on his door.

Loki slips his leggings back on quickly, lacing them up and pausing as he goes to tie it off. They are left open. He eyes the loose sleep tunic slung over the back of a chair and ignores it, before casting a quick glance in the mirrors and fixing an errant curl.

When Loki opens the door, Thor freezes, the hand posed to knock falls to his side.

Loki knows how he looks. His skin is still damp from the cool bath, blue skin glistening and showcasing every intricate detailing line of his heritage marks. Even though he opts to wear far less than the average Asgardian, Loki knows this is more Jotun than Thor has ever seen.

"Can I help you?" Loki finally asks, when silence ticks by in seconds.

Thor wets his lips and looks away, somewhere past Loki's head.

"I came to tell you the Council has agreed to meet and discuss trade at the end of the week."

"Oh, of course," Loki tries to sound disappointed. He's not.

It will be better if Thor thinks he's expecting something else. Play the part of the swooning admirer, Loki tells himself. Weasel into his heart and mind and crack him open.

Loki only needs one thing.

"I should be going," Thor says, clearing his voice with a cough. In the warm light of candles, Loki can still see the pink on his cheeks.

"Why don't you come in?"

For a moment, Loki thinks Thor will decline. He certainly looks like a man waging a mental war—probably sorting out every pro and con to being alone with him at night, half-naked, with a bed so close. But when Loki steps to the side and opens the door, Thor enters.

“Jotunheim is rich in iron ore,” Loki says casually.

“What?”

“For trade,” he clarifies, moving to the small desk to pour a drink from the wineskin. A gift from Thor from earlier in his arrival. He hasn’t dared drink any yet, for fear of it being poisoned. But he hardly finds that to be a concern now.

“Oh,” Thor says a little too quickly; takes the cup when Loki hands it to him. “Of course.”

Loki takes a sip while Thor chugs it like an animal. Sometimes, to Loki’s horror, it’s easy to forget the blood on his hands. He refuses to let the memory fade, and in moments such as this— where Thor is looking at him so intently, handsome in the worst way— he touches the fire opal ring at his neck to remember.

Loki carefully sits his glass down and leans against the desk, hyper-aware of his state of undress, but fully prepared to use it to his advantage.

“Tell me, Thor,” Loki purrs. “What does Asgard have to offer Jotunheim?”

Thor’s nostrils flare. He looks like he could eat him whole— and Loki isn’t half sure he’d stop him.

“Gold. Asgard has it in abundance.”

“And what would I do with that?” Loki asks, breathlessly. He shifts closer and Thor mirrors him until they are mere inches apart. So close that he can smell whatever perfumed oils he’s doused himself with. “Gold is beautiful, but soft.”

In a moment of brief stupidity, Loki reaches out and walks his fingers up Thor’s chest, stopping at the collar of his tunic. As suspected, there isn’t a thing soft about him.

Finally, it fully registers that he’s *touching* Thor. Loki looks up, hesitantly, and finds Thor watching him with dark eyes, the blue is nearly gone. A firm hand comes to grab ahold of his wrist but doesn’t move to push him away.

Something hot curls in his gut.

Thor moves first, pushing him back against the desk. Loki hops up on reflex, letting his legs fall open to accommodate him. Thor’s hands are everywhere, roaming up his side’s grabbing onto his hips to drag him forward. One finds his hair and then further up, his horn, where he uses to it tilts his head to the side.

Oh.

The first pulse of arousal jolts Loki back to his senses. Thor is there, touching and nosing at his jaw. It’d be easy to give himself over. It’s been so long. When was the last time? That Vanir mercenary nearly three seasons ago?

Loki scrambles for purchase on Thor’s arms when he feels a hot, wet lick against his neck. Normally so gentle, and reserved, finally the beast comes out.

Loki bets Thor fucks as he fights on the battlefield, brutal and punishing.

It's that thought that has him pushing away. "Stop," he says firmly, and Thor obeys instantaneously, pulling back with panting breaths. "We'll mess everything up."

It's more-so directed to himself. Gaining favor through harmless flirtations was one thing. Letting the King of Asgard fuck him on a desk was another—no matter that his cock was already swelling and, further down, dampness blossoming.

"You're right," Thor agrees. He steps back, running his hand along his face.

Loki can't help but let his eyes linger downward, finding exactly what he knew he would between Thor's legs. Like everything else about him, the line of his cock is huge. Surely big enough to put a Jotun runt to shame— but Loki held something sweeter.

"It wouldn't be wise," Loki says, another verbal reminder to himself.

"Being wise was more for my father." Thor's face splits into a grin and whatever awkward tension from their encounter dissipates.

If there is one thing this trip has shown him, it's that Thor is not his father. He's much more easily manipulated, much more trusting. Wise, in his own way, but not in this.

Loki feels bad, almost.

"I should bid you goodnight," Thor says, giving a flourished bow and backing slowly to the door.

When Thor leaves, the door closed behind him, Loki gives a flick of his wrists and locks every mechanism available.

act i.iii

Chapter Notes

hi, i woke up today sick and then slept for like six hours and woke up to bust this chapter out. i took some medicine so i sincerely hope this makes sense and its not a bunch of rambling nonsense. there will probably be a lot of errors until i'm lucid enough to properly edit. thank you! and i hope you enjoy. :) thank you all for your feedback so far! it fuels me.

Loki pointedly *doesn't* think about the previous night.

Except for that he does, *a lot*. And it only further proves that he needs to act quicker and smarter. The memory of Thor's weight on him, rough hands on his body, and hot tongue on his skin will only unnecessarily bog him down.

There's a brief fear that rings in the back of his mind. What if that is Thor's intention? Distract him with flattery and desire.

A very dirty game, indeed. One that only Loki banks on playing.

The metaphorical sand in his hourglass is dwindling, growing more impatient than Loki himself.

He calls for Thor the moment a handmaid arrives to change his linens. She's put-off, like she isn't used to foreign ambassadors waltzing in and demanding the attention of her king. However, she does so, even if a bit begrudgingly.

As expected, his request near instantly met. The fool probably thinks they will have a repeat of their late-night visit. Loki, the swooning Jotun ready to jump on the opportunity for a tumble in his royal bed! He ignores the way his cheeks purple as he puts the finishing touches on his braid.

"Prince Loki," Thor says warmly the moment he catches a glimpse of him from across the greenhouse. He's too distracted by the scenery— beautiful, really, even he can admit that— to protest Thor once again lifting his hand to kiss his knuckles.

They are way past formalities, but Loki lets it slide.

Thor leads them to a small set-up beneath a canopy of hanging green and lavender. Loki blinks at the table, glass and gold with fine plates and a hot kettle, finger foods far more delicate than what he's grown to expect from Asgard. All the while, Thor sits, too small for his station, and Loki has to resist the urge to outright laugh.

Thor, King of Asgard, is throwing a tea party. It's adorable, in its own right. Sweet, even.

He was right in his previous assessment— *gold is soft*.

Loki smiles and plays along, sitting down and watching Thor nervously bounce his knee. “You have a beautiful greenhouse,” he comments, idly fiddling with a filigree-carved utensil. “Are all of these native to Asgard?”

“No,” Thor admits, looking around and taking in flowers surrounding them as if it’s the first time he’s noticed. “It’s my mother’s project, there are species from all corners of the nine realms.”

Ah, yes, the queen. He can’t help but notice her absence. Curious.

“Your mother,” Loki attempts to sound conversational, rather than prying. “Where is she?”

And your father, Loki doesn’t say. He’d rather have a run-in with the former King. Somehow, he’s sure hearing Thor speak of him would sully their nice time.

“Vanaheim, both of them.”

Interesting, but Thor doesn’t elaborate. His knee only resumes its shaking. Doubly interesting.

“I was thinking!” Thor blurts out.

Loki takes a sip of his tea to stop himself from making a snide remark. An achievement, he’s sure.

“We didn’t properly celebrate your arrival, tonight I plan to host a feast in your honor.”

Nearly four weeks into his stay, it seems a bit late. But any chance to get Thor loose with alcohol is a good prospect. More determined than ever to pry the information he needs from Thor, this is his perfect opportunity.

It’s almost too good to be true, and Thor proves that when he opens his mouth next.

“It would be a great chance for you to mingle with more Asgardians. Gain their trust and acceptance.”

Loki nearly chokes on his drink.

“I hardly think that matters, my dealings are with you and the Council,” Loki says, a lot smoother than he thought himself capable. Thor’s face falls, and it’s a pitiful sight. Flirtation, that always works. “I feel *you* like me just fine.”

It does work because Thor’s eyes darken and there is the faintest upward twitch of his lip. Loki can’t help but remember just how fine Thor likes him.

He crosses his legs.

“I’d be delighted to attend,” Loki assures him.

It turns out, like most things Loki says, that’s a lie. He’s not delighted in the slightest.

The feast is more extravagant than any event he’s ever attended—people in over-the-top garb with tankards of mead splashing and spilling as they danced in contagious jubilation.

Disgusting.

And Thor, dressed in his ceremonial armor, hair once again braided in Jotun fashion, red cape forcing Loki's eyes to gravitate toward him, is nearly impossible to reach. Twice he's cut off from going to him, by the pawing hands of a nobleman, in awe of his blue skin.

"Excuse me," Loki says, polite but venomous, and snatches his arm away. This is exactly what he didn't want to happen. It's bad enough he has to spend copious amounts of time in *one* Asgardian's presence.

"You're just so beautiful," the man purrs, dull hazel eyes regarding him in such a lewd manner that Loki's skin actually crawls. Frantically, he searches the crowd for any sign of Thor, hoping he can release a silent plea the oaf's drunk mind *thah* will catch.

"Exceedingly."

Thor— and Loki hates that there is a relief.

He takes Loki by the arm, looping it with his and pulling him tight. The nobleman's eyes go wide, and he bows in respect to his King but immediately shuffles off.

Thor bends down to whisper in his ear, and the action jolts a memory of a similar gesture. "Is this too much?"

Way too much, but Loki just nods. "I would like some fresh air."

"Of course."

Thor leads him toward an exit, the people parting and splitting the crowd to form a path. It's mesmerizing and Loki feels powerful. There are whispers, but he can't make any of them out. Too hushed, and unpleasant.

"I shouldn't have left your side," Thor says once they've entered the empty hall. Their footsteps echo in the towering archways, everything a pretty shade of blue in the dark of the night.

"I'm perfectly capable of handling myself."

Thor laughs and nudges him, forcing Loki to look over and witness that stupid, fond expression he always wears.

"Oh, I know that."

"Good," Loki sniffs but holds onto Thor's arm a little tighter.

They are alone, and Thor smells of sour ale and there is an ungraceful step to his walk. Loki, on the other hand, traded all his wine for water. His head is, for the most part, clear. Its because of this, he realizes they have wandered to an unfamiliar wing.

"Where are we?"

Thor looks around, like he doesn't know for sure.

"The west wing. My father's studies are here."

"Oh," Loki says, eyes roaming over every door, memorizing them. There's no doubt the vault is behind one of these.

And, probably, if Loki has to guess—behind the large one guarded by two Einherjar. He can feel

the icy power calling to him. It's a miracle he doesn't stop in his tracks.

"What's in there?" he asks, innocently. "To be so heavily guarded?"

Thor looks at the door, mouth working open and closed with no words coming out. He then looks back at Loki and sighs quietly. "A few of items of my father's collection."

Loki's heart may very well escape his chest.

He commits the door to memory but doesn't let his eyes linger. Doesn't give himself away, shrugs and pretends not to be all that interested. They don't speak much after that, but Loki leans into his shoulder and rests his head while they walk. Takes his mind off whatever panic Thor is feeling by foolishly feeding a Jotun such precious information.

"There is actually something I would like to discuss."

He stops them beneath an open arch overlooking Asgard, the site is truly something to behold. In his stay, Loki has learned to appreciate her beauty, whether he wants to or not. Asgard's moon hangs over the distant mountains, and below Loki can see the Bifrost glitter in its rainbow glory.

He's almost forgotten Thor has spoken at all.

"Of course," Loki says quietly. Though, he hasn't the faintest idea what it could be about. His stomach tightens at the prospect of Thor bringing up their encounter. Discussing it beneath a romantic moonlight might prove difficult. He may even be tempted to act on such desires.

After all, it will all crumble after tonight.

"I must confess," Thor is saying, and Loki tries really hard to pay attention. "There are undisclosed reasons for me asking you here."

Loki's heart skips a beat, and he wonders how quickly he can summon a blade.

"An assassination attempt?" Loki jokes— partly.

Thor laughs lightly, shaking his head. He seems to almost be illuminated in the pale light, and Loki immediately dispels such silly poetry.

"No, as you know the relationship between Asgard and Jotunheim has been rocky."

"A bit of an understatement but go on."

"Why should we waste time hashing out these affairs with councils and board meetings?"

Loki isn't sure where this is going. He's been saying for weeks they should negotiate one-on-one. Prince to king, king to prince.

"Yes," Loki agrees, but it comes out as a question. Thor lets out a frustrated little noise; he's clearly not picking up what is being laid out.

"Don't you think?" Thor starts, licking his lips. "That a political marriage would be the best solution?"

Loki thinks he very well may have died. This is Hel, he's in Hel.

"Thor, I'm afraid Helblindi is much too big for you. It would never work."

Play dumb, this will go away.

Thor actually laughs at that, a full-bodied laugh that doesn't grate quite as bad on Loki's nerves as it once did.

"Loki Laufeyson," Thor says, bundling up Loki's hands in his. Loki's too frozen in place to move or speak or think. "Would you do the honor of marrying me out of convenience for our realms?" Then, with a sly smile and stupid grin adds, "and because you are the most extraordinary Jotun I've ever met."

"I'm the only Jotun you've ever met."

"The sentiment remains true."

Something clicks.

"You lured me here to seduce me!"

"Did it work?" Thor asks, hopeful with one eye open.

Loki frowns because the truth is— it very nearly did. It would make sense, a marriage. It would bind the two realms together, forming a permanent alliance. Jotunheim could prosper again, under the aid of Asgard. But no—that's precisely why it would never work.

Helblindi would never bow to Asgard. They were too proud and too wounded. This would be a slap to his kingdom's face.

"Do you think you could be happy here?" Thor asks, quietly, in the wake of Loki's silence.

"Yes," Loki blinks and finds it's not a lie.

Loki requests Thor ask him again in the morning, with a clear head. Thor, ever the gentleman, agrees and sees him back to his chambers. This time, there is no heated exchange, but a tender hand placed on his cheek and fond smile given.

His heart nearly aches to know in the morning, he will be gone with the Casket.

In front of the mirror, Loki calls forth his seidr. He closes his eyes, and when they reopen, the reflection only shows the contents of his room. His body is gone, invisible.

Retracing his steps proves easier than he thought. Loki easily knocks the Einherjar out with a touch of seidr—they are built for swords and shields, not magic. He likes to think that's what makes him so formidable.

The Casket sings to him.

Loki walks with great trepidation as he greets it. A symbol of all Jotunheim's power and all that his people have lost. A relic locked up in a prison on enemy lands. In his heart, he knows the truth, it belongs with him and in the heart of their city.

He hesitates, staring down at the swirl of blue, and the powerful magic it emits with every ticking second.

Loki thinks of Thor, of his proposal and the treacherous part of his heart that wanted to accept. As much as it pains him to admit, the new King has a kind heart. He would probably hand the Casket over as a wedding gift if Loki truly needed.

They could do this without the bloodshed.

Loki thinks of Jotunheim, of his broken home in its advanced state of deterioration. He thinks of his brother's body on a burning pyre. The families torn apart by a war waged with Asgard— by Thor's father. Laufey had only been following Odin's influence, attempting to spread Jotunheim's rule.

But, Asgard liked to remain supreme. They must rule over all else. And, wouldn't it be like them to want to hold Jotnar prosperity over their heads?

Loki scoffs and takes the casket.

act ii.i

Chapter Summary

act two: the betrayal

100 years later, the war is over. Jotunheim has lost, again.

Chapter Notes

the beginning of act ii. also, some of this chapter will look very familiar to those that have read the 100 lifetimes story this was based on! thank you for all your feedback so far! i really appreciate it! <3

It's unfortunate that they meet again on the icy battlefield of Jotunheim; white snow and ice stained red from fallen Jotnar and Aesir.

Loki isn't surprised, he knew this day would come the moment he took the Casket. It had taken him years to recondition himself not to think of Thor, or the way there was a slight shake in the penmanship of his letter claiming war.

Loki had anticipated all this.

And, though he had imagined Thor on top of him in many ways, straddling his waist with Mjolnir raised high above his head wasn't one of them. He hadn't the chance to admire her during his stay in Asgard, so he takes the time to do so now. Shiny, blunt, with unnerving power radiating from her core.

"Do you yield?"

Loki scoffs, he's currently being held down by the solid weight of the King of Asgard, about to have his head smashed in with an overgrown hammer. He's already been maimed once by a piece of brutal Asgardian weaponry. That night in the vaults had been a narrow escape and left him with a scar to down the line of his back to remember.

Still. Of course, he doesn't yield.

"My, Thor, you look ravishing," Loki says with a wicked grin.

It isn't a lie. Thor looks exceptional against the backdrop of Jotunheim, just as handsome as the day Loki left him, if not a little rougher around the edges. His cape billows red behind him, and his icy blue eyes narrow. There's no humor on his handsome face. It seems Loki's charms have run dry. What was the saying? Fool me once.

Loki presses his head into the snow, inky black hair spilling over like oil. Thor pulls his hammer back farther, preparing to strike. And, for the first time, there is panic.

Thor looks murderous and betrayed.

“Retreat your forces, concede to Asgard’s army.”

Anger bubbles inside Loki, and he does well to restrain himself from slapping Thor across the cheek with an open palm. To back down would be shameful, and he’s already a Jotun of stunted pride. He’d fought and clawed his way to earn his rank, despite his nobility, to rise above his height. Thor knew this, and yet he had the audacity to ask Loki to give it up.

Again. That’s what is proposal meant as well, though he didn’t know it.

“Jotunheim has already lost, let them fight to the death. Let them die with honor,” Loki spits. They won’t concede a second time. Let it be done, if it must. They were due to rot anyway— Laufey is dead, and who knows how Helblindi will take defeat.

“Every one of them will die. There will be only you left. You will be the Prince of Nothing.”

Loki lets out a hollow laugh, and it rings through the plains. It’s hard to believe not so very long ago, Thor was willing to let him be the Consort of Asgard.

“And then what? You would kill me?”

For the briefest of moments, something flashes across Thor’s face. He blinks it away and his scowl returns. A glimpse of a Thor that Loki remembers.

“If Asgard commands it.”

Loki’s blue lips curl back to reveal his clenched teeth. Of course, Thor will put his realm and himself before anyone else. Yet, he chastises Loki for doing the same thing. He knows that the people of Asgard will demand his execution, as sure as he knows Thor will follow through with it.

Loki claims himself a lot of things, but naive is not one of them. He had known this has always been a possibility and prepared for it. Scoured every last tome in Jotunheim until he found the ancient magic he sought. Studied and practiced until he was confident in his ability to perform it.

Jotunheim is already lost, at least he can save himself.

Before Thor can react, Loki grabs the sides of his face, jerking him down. His blue fingers sink into the soft flesh of his cheeks, and Loki closes his eyes and reaches for his seidr, weaving a spell with an enchantment whispered under his breath. Thor tries to pull away, but the magic has already taken root. Loki can feel it in his bones; he feels stronger.

Thor pulls back, and Loki lets him, dropping the hammer and grabbing at his face where Loki has touched him.

“What did you do, *witch*?”

Loki lets him squirm just a little longer. Thor keeps checking his palms, then flips them over to look at the backs of his hands, and then back to examining the palms. It’s as if he thinks he will turn into a frog. Even Loki has to admit that would have been a rather humorous alternative.

“I bonded us,” Loki explains calmly— though he is anything but calm.

The bonding spell is complicated magic and not easily broken. It’s a foolish decision to bond with his sworn enemy, but it’s also his best hope at not ending up a pile of mush beneath the blunt

surface of Mjolnir.

“Should you harm me,” Loki continues. “Or, knowingly let harm come to me...”

Thor looks at him in horror. Loki knows he knows what he’s going to say before he says it. There is no doubt Thor can feel it too—the magic pulling them together. He can probably feel every beat of Loki’s heart, every spike of adrenaline that pumps through his veins.

“You will too die.”

Thor stares down at him, cold wind whipping his golden hair. Loki can see the gears turning in his head, processing what that means, working out how to proceed. Will he leave Loki on the frozen wasteland littered with the body of his fallen countrymen? Or, will he bring Loki back to Asgard to live safely in the palace?

Loki will happily take either of those options if it means he stays alive.

“You lie,” Thor hisses.

“Not about this.”

“How can I believe anything you say? This is all a clever scheme to save yourself.”

Clever, yes, but not a lie. However, there is something in the way Thor sounds almost hurt with the words that tug on something long-since dormant and frozen in his chest. He doesn’t like it.

“Do you care to test that theory?” Loki asks. He summons his blade, and before Thor can react in defense, Loki holds the blade to his own chest and levels him with a look of chaotic defiance. “Do it then.”

Thor wraps a hand around the handle, face never cracking, determined to call his bluff. The moment Thor’s cold fingers brush him, Loki drops his hands to the side and closes his eyes. He waits with bated breath, but the stinging pierce of his dagger never comes.

When Loki cracks his eyes open, he sees Thor staring down at him, defeated, despite having won the war.

The blade is tossed to the side, sinks to be forgotten in the snow.

“You will come to regret this,” Thor tells him.

Loki counts on that.

“Let’s make the best of it.”

act ii.ii

The walk back to the Bifrost site is difficult, even to Loki, who has trekked these dangerous planes all his life. The mechanics of the Bifrost aren't clear to him, but he's fairly certain Thor can call the portal from any location.

This has a purpose. To humiliate, and to cause discomfort.

It's working.

From his horse, Thor tugs hard on the chains connected to Loki's wrists, stumbling him along. Humiliating, to the point. Loki glares up at him, but Thor never looks in his direction. Eyes straight forward, as the Asgardian camp becomes clearer on the horizon.

The cuffs on his wrists are engraved with magic runes that Loki recognizes, Vanir and powerful. They block his seidr effectively, much to his horror. But what's more unsettling than that is the fact Thor had these ready.

Thor had prepared to drag him, powerless, back to Asgard.

And, something tells Loki there wouldn't have been a wedding trellis waiting for him. A guillotine, perhaps— much more likely. Now that neither one is a possibility, Loki isn't sure what fate awaits him in Asgard.

Loki walks alongside the horse, hands held to his chest to accommodate the short chain attaching him and Thor, and can't help but think of the metaphorical link now connecting them.

The magic link he put there.

He read up on the bond prior to this final battle, but it's still old magic. Banned magic, at that. One thing that Loki does know, is that the bond is stronger than the damned manacles on his wrists. He'll be able to access it freely once he figures out exactly how.

No time like the present to practice.

His seidr is gone, but he can feel the tendrils of something else in his place. Crude, and archaic, but strong and present. It takes a moment for Loki to recognize that it's the bond he feels, but when he pokes deeper there's no mistake.

This is the thread that weaves them both together.

Loki closes his eyes and focuses on the sharp pain in his side, the one he'd gained after about an hour of walking with his injuries. He finds the bond, pushes the pain through, and looks up just in time to see Thor's face scrunch up and his hand fly to his side.

Good to know.

Loki lets out a light chuckle, which Thor doesn't seem to appreciate one bit. He tugs again on the short bite of chain and Loki nearly loses his footing.

"How much longer?" Loki snarls.

Thor says nothing.

“I said—”

“I heard you,” Thor snaps. He cuts his eyes down to Loki briefly before letting them return to the horizon. It’s faint, but Loki sees hesitation and the smallest amount of guilt. He knows how he looks right now, battered and molted with bruises.

Let him feel shame. He’s the one that did this.

By the time they arrive at camp, the Asgardians have already cleared and moved to stand and wait for their King’s call to send them home. There aren’t many left, the Bifrost must have already sent for the others. The only evidence they’d been there at all is the imprints of boots in snow and charred wood from fires.

And the carnage, of course.

A sick feeling twists in his stomach, it’s worse than any corporal pain he’s felt. The reality of what has happened sinks in, and he contemplates pushing that through the bond too. Thor deserves to feel as he does, but he refrains. Loki refuses give him the satisfaction of knowing he’s made him feel this way.

Instead, he remains calm and quiet in his seidr-repressing bondage beside Thor’s steed.

A warrior approaches them, from her armor Loki can tell she’s of the Valkyrie division. Her steely demeanor falls the moment her eyes land on Loki, and his lips crack in the corners when attempts a taunting grin.

“May I ask what you’re doing with him?” There’s a rather sharp blade that accompanies her words, announcing *him*, but Loki doesn’t flinch. If she cuts him, she cuts her King. Let her.

“A war prize,” Thor explains. His tone is harsh and final. “Is everything ready to leave?”

The Valkyrie’s eyes never leave his. She doesn’t trust him, its good to know that someone has some common sense around here.

“Aye.”

“Get everyone in assembly. I’ll make the call to Heimdall.”

“Your Majesty,” the Valkyrie says, sheathing her sword but keeping her hands on the hilt. “I would suggest you leave this one here. He doesn’t look like he has much life in him, will probably wither before he ever makes it back home.”

That’s assuming there is a home left to go back to. It’s a feat that Loki doesn’t spit at her, but he’d rather not test to see how much she can cut before Thor bleeds too.

“He’s coming with me.”

“Public execution?” She asks with a raise of her brow, like that particular scenario is favorable.

“Brunnhilde,” Thor warns.

The Valkyrie, Brunnhilde, heaves a sigh and turns around, immediately shouting commands to the busy camp around her. Thor watches her go, but Loki can see his mind is far away. He takes the opportunity to really study him— he's grown older around the eyes and his beard is thicker, hair is darker and longer. Still handsome, despite his lack of blue. But there is a resentment in his gaze on the rare occasion he looks Loki's way.

"The people are going to wonder why that isn't the case," Loki says conversationally.

"The people will not question their King."

Loki snorts back a laugh. "That's where—"

"And neither will you."

His mouth immediately closes at that implication. *Thor is his King*. He detests the notion. That will never prove true, no matter how many centuries Loki spends bound to Asgard. His heart, his loyalty, will always remain here, in Jotunheim.

Thor leads them to the front of the troop, and to the edge of a cliff. Loki looks out, one last time, at his home and tries to seal away this view in his memory. Towering mountains of ice, swaths of snow and crystal. It may very well be the last time he ever sees it again.

Thor calls on the Gatekeeper, and the Bifrost descends in a brilliant light to swallow them up.

The streets of Asgard are lined with people, all cheering and screaming for the return of the last battalion and their King. Loki sees Thor smile for the first time, and he's brought back a simpler time that held harder decisions.

He hears the gasps too, when they see the wounded Jotun trailing in chains. Bloodied and bruised, leathers ripped, and furs caked in mud and frost. He knows what they call him.

Loki the Betrayer.

The walk to the golden steps of the palace is far longer than any stretch on Jotunheim. The cheers turn to sneers the moment the people realize who they're looking at. Only once is he forced to dodge a rather large rock, but he arrives relatively unscathed.

Pride, however, mortally damaged.

A flock of golden and shiny Einherjar greets them with solemn faces and sharp spears.

"Thor!"

From the top of the steps, in a golden flurry, Queen Frigga descends with outstretched arms. Thor unmounts his horse and meets her in a forceful embrace, squeezing her to his chest and burying his head in her curls like an overgrown child.

It's all a very sweet reunion, but Loki can't help but notice the absence of Odin.

When Frigga pulls back, patting at her son's scruffy cheek, she finally notices Loki's presence. He

watches her eyes take him in, following the chain at his wrists to where they are bound to the horse's saddle.

"What is this?"

Thor kisses her forehead, but it does nothing to soothe the worry in her brow.

"I'll explain later," he tells her. He moves to grab the chain, all while giving Loki a stern look that says very clearly one thing: *Don't open your mouth*. The chain is then handed to a guard.

"Take him to a cell, away from the others."

He's not sure what he was expecting. His old quarters? A nice bed? Of course, he's being thrown into a cell. He's a prisoner of his own making.

The alternative being a corpse, perhaps it's not so bad.

The cell the guard brings him too is primitive at best. Beyond the typical holding cells, up a winding set of stairs, lays a corridor of empty rooms with flagstone floors and irons bars.

This is to be Loki's new home. A common jailhouse.

The guard throws him in and slams the bars closed without ever uttering a word, leaving Loki with the bare essentials including a lumpy mat for a bed.

"Perfect," Loki says flatly, and to no one.

He takes inventory of what little he has now and sighs when it tallies to a grand total of *three*.

The mat is just as uncomfortable as it looks when he sits on it, he can feel every bump and rock beneath. He unclasps his fur cloak and makes a makeshift cushion. It works, to a degree, and he curls up on the only thing that reminds him of home.

Hours pass and all Loki finds he's capable of doing is staring at the wall and counting the cracks in the rock. Even in his zoned-out haze, he notices the presence behind the bars.

"I didn't think you'd come."

Loki doesn't have to look to know it's Thor standing there. His anger radiates enough to rattle the cage.

"This will be the last time."

"Why come at all?" Loki digs his nails into the fur beneath him. He wishes he didn't bother; the situation is humiliating enough without Thor seeing him like this. It must be very satisfying.

"I want you to remember something," Thor says, and Loki finally raises his head to see him. He'd bathed. Clean and fresh and in new crisp clothes, all with a trimmed beard.

"What?" Loki bites back, bitter with the knowledge he won't be getting the same luxury.

“This was your doing.”

Thor turns in a blur of red, and Loki lets his head fall back down, glassy eyes staring straight ahead. He counts Thor’s footsteps until he can no longer hear them, and then resumes counting the cracks on the wall.

act ii.iii

By the second week, Loki is on the verge of madness.

He's alone, all hours, save the passing moments when a guard slips him a tray of slop through the opening in the bars. Each meal sits there with the last until it collects flies, and someone takes it with a sneer. Loki isn't even sure *they* know what they're serving him. It may not be poisoned, but it'll surely kill him.

Day after day, Loki lays on his back, hands folded on his thinning ribs and channels every ounce of hunger through the bond.

He's not sure if it works or not. Thor keeps true to his word, he doesn't return to Loki's cell. Loki can't say he's surprised or disappointed. He expected as much.

That's Thor, isn't it? Loyal to a fault.

His wrists are sore from the hours he's spent slamming the iron manacles against the walls and bars of his prison. If only he could wriggle free of one, he might be able to conjure up a spell small enough to enchant the next servant who brings him his meal.

Loki gets a crack in one, and for the most minuscule of seconds, feels a sliver of his old power. It disappears faster than it came, the crack glowing green and fixing itself. He had screamed so loud, an Einherjar nearly broke a leg tripping up the stairs to find out what happened.

On the third week, it storms. Rain pours, blown in erratic and slanted waves through the barred window. Loki has to drag his water-logged mat across the cell to dry it out. It pools below the window, and in his own horror and embarrassment, he kneels to cup it in his hands. It tastes of dirt and stone, but it's fresher than anything he's been served in his confinement.

In the reflection, Loki really sees himself for the first time since leaving Jotunheim.

His split lip has healed, but there is still a swell under his left eye, and even in the watery mirror, he can see yellows and greens on his blue flesh. Black hair once kept perfectly groomed frames his face in uncontrolled curls, frizzed with the humidity of the hot Asgard weather.

Every heritage line mocks him.

He's brought such shame and sorrow to Jotunheim. To his parted father, to his brother. Thor's voice echoes through his mind louder than the slow drip of rain through the window.

This was your doing.

Loki slams his fist into the water, fracturing his reflection. He can't look at himself a moment longer.

Slowly, he drags his tired body to the center of the cell, stripping himself of his damp leathers until he's stark naked; blue in a cage of gray. If there's one good thing about the rain, it's the drop in the temperature. Loki lays down against the cold flagstone and lets himself cool.

It's not the snow and ice of Jotunheim, but it comforts him all the same.

He doesn't know how many of them are left. His family, or his people. He doesn't know what's

become of the capital or his home. They hadn't even had the time to rebuild their ruins before Thor declared war. He'd hoped, foolishly, that at least some damage would be reversed.

They couldn't afford to lose a second time. But they did.

They lost.

Now, Loki has lost everything. He should have had Thor kill him in Jotunheim.

Loki presses his face into the stone floor, closes his eyes, and breathes in the scent of the storm. It smells familiar, but not comforting.

On the fourth week, *she* comes. Queen Frigga.

Two Einherjar flank her sides, but she dismisses them with a wave of her hand. She's no longer reigning queen, but her elegance and grace remain intact. Loki can tell she was bred for royalty; she knows how to play. She's good at it.

He turns, defiantly, before she can address him.

"My son has been quite hungry these passing weeks."

Loki doesn't look at her, stays curled on his furs, facing the wall. He can hear the clack of her heel as she moves. Probably straining to see a movement in his ribs, checking to see if he's still breathing.

Loki holds his breath. Let her think him dead. Maybe he can claw his way out of whatever ditch they throw him in. Or, maybe, if he holds it long enough, he'll actually die. Death could be a mercy.

"It's the strangest thing," she continues. "He eats and eats. Yet, he's always suffering from the most severe stomach pains."

Loki turns and stares. Frigga doesn't waver, though he does notice the slightest flinch in her perfectly postured stance. He must really be a sight, the Queen looks as if she pities him.

"Maybe he's eaten too much then?" Loki offers. "I'm not a doctor."

"No, you aren't," Frigga says in wonder, cocking her head to the side to fully take him in. It's unnerving, being under her scrutiny. "I'm puzzled as to what exactly you are, Son of Laufey."

"I'm Jotun."

"You're much more than that."

Loki narrows his eyes at her. Is flattery this family's only form of weaponry? She has seemingly nothing to gain from Loki's favor, yet here she is— looking at him kinder than anyone in this realm has since, well, her son. Many years ago.

"Betrayer. Witch. Runt," Loki spits. "There's a few."

Frigga hums and kneels at the bars, her golden gown fanning out against the grimy floor of the tower. She looks so out of place that it's almost jarring. He wants to tell her to leave, but the sound of a voice that isn't his own is far too sweet.

"I was very angry with him when I returned from Vanaheim," Frigga tells him. "I couldn't believe he had brought you here."

"Invited the enemy to your doorstep."

Frigga gives him a sympathetic smile and shakes her head. "He wrote to me while you were still here. He told me of his intentions. When I got here it was too late."

"Oh," Loki breathes out. His face twists into a cruel mockery of a smile. "You didn't wish to see your son marry a Jotun runt."

"You misunderstand me, Prince Loki."

Loki sneers at the word, but Frigga's tone holds no ridicule. She doesn't mean to taunt him with his stripped title, it's as if that's how she views him still. Prince of Jotunheim.

"Though his intentions were honorable, his methods were tactless. I don't think he saw how this proposal would look to you. Like you were just a pawn in his plan for peace. You came here as an Ambassador, yet he never had any intentions on letting you play out your part."

Loki sits up, his matted fur falling from his shoulders. He doesn't tell her his role as Ambassador was yet another charade, but he suspects she knows that anyway. Still, he can hardly believe his ears. Queen Frigga, Thor's own mother, has come to take his side.

"This is not to say you don't share the blame."

Loki visibly deflates.

"You both caused your homes a great deal of tragedy and death. You both caused a war that could have easily been avoided."

He fights the urge to curl in on himself. He's so small now, he may disappear. It's a nice thought. To disappear.

Loki has already thought about Frigga's words on his own countless times. This all could have been avoided. What if he had just accepted the proposal? Maybe he would be sleeping beneath silk sheets next to the warm body of someone who may have genuinely grown to love him. Maybe he could have restored the Casket to Jotunheim, and his home would flourish while he lived happily in his new one.

But no, everything is broken.

He sleeps on a mat in a cell, alone. The Casket is once again in Asgard. The fate of Jotunheim is a mystery, but without the Casket, not a very big one. If it's not gone already, it will be soon. He still ends up in Asgard, but not happily.

"Do you think you could be happy here?"

Loki presses his palms to his red eyes. Hard, to keep the tears from spilling, but it has no use. He hasn't allowed himself to cry since he arrived. Now they may never stop.

When he looks back up, vision blurred, Frigga is standing. She watches him with quiet regard and a kind smile. He wishes she wouldn't look at him so. It isn't something he deserves.

"He'll never forgive me," Loki says quietly. Until that moment, he hasn't realized that's something he seeks. Forgiveness.

Solitude wears you down like that, he supposes.

"My son is stubborn," Frigga says. "But he does forgive."

Loki huddles his knees to his chest and buries his head between them. When? In a decade? In a millennium? His stomach rumbles and twists with hunger. He'll die by the time Thor fancies himself merciful.

"He isn't the only one that needs to do so."

Frigga leaves, and Loki is once again alone. With a head full of thoughts to haunt him and lull him into a restless sleep.

Loki wakes to scorching sun, the annoying chatter of a shrike, and the rattling of bars. Once he registers that last noise for what it is, he bolts up from his makeshift bed.

The door is open, and Loki rubs his eyes to make sure he's not hallucinating. That's it, probably. This is a dream. He's finally cracked.

"Prince Loki, it's time we find you more suitable chambers." Frigga steps from behind the frame, impossibly radiant in the morning light. Her hand is outstretched, and Loki takes it, pulling himself up to weak knees. "But first, a bath and trip to the healers."

He could hug her, but that would be far too inappropriate.

"Does Thor know?"

Frigga gives him a wry smile, eyes crinkling in the corners just as Thor's do. "Does it matter? I am Queen."

Loki feels himself laugh, and it's a strange but welcoming sound. She takes him by the elbow and leads him out the door. He chances one last look at his holding cell until Frigga urges him on.

Loki doesn't look back.

act iii.i

Chapter Summary

act three: false freedom

The chambermaid that draws his bath asks if he'd like it cold, says that she can fetch ice from the kitchens. Loki ignores her and steps into the hot water, steam rolling off the top and thickening the air with moisture.

Asgardians, they truly know nothing of the Jotnar.

She brings him oils, dripping a floral scented one into the spacious tub where he lays back to let every aching muscle soak. Loki makes sure to keep the bond closed, he would never want Thor to feel relief and relaxation such as this. The chambermaid washes his hair, brushing it carefully from behind him. He can see her in the mirror at the foot of the bath, every movement is jerky, and her lips are pressed into a thin line.

She hates this.

That's just as well, Loki doesn't care for her either. But he does enjoy being pampered, so he allows her to braid back his hair, despite it being done in Asgardian fashion.

When the water runs cold, she fetches him a robe and leads him through the door connecting to his new chambers.

It's not as spacious or extravagant as his previous ones, on Jotunheim or his first stay. Still, it's a major improvement from the cell and even more so, death.

There's a knock on his door as he pulls on the clothes laid out for him— a clean, linen tunic and dark breeches. Common-wear, but not the stiff leathers he's been marinating in for over a month. There is the slightest expectation in his chest that it will be Thor when he opens the door.

It's not, but yet another servant to escort him to the healer. No matter how he protests, they insist. Frigga's orders. The bath has dulled his aches, and the trip is unnecessary, but he goes all the same.

The soul forge finds nothing broken, but there is a peculiar anomaly within his chest. Eir, the head healer, pokes at it with a curious finger.

"This is strong magic," she tells him. "Dark magic."

Loki stares up at the wispy red apparition of his body, and the glowing ball of light that marks the bond.

"Thank you."

She looks at him in surprise. Her words were clearly not a compliment, but Loki can't help but feel proud that he pulled such complicated spell work in such a short time, in such pressing circumstances. Eir doesn't comment again, but he does catch her eyes wandering back to it from time to time as he finishes up his exam.

By the time he arrives back to his room, he's ready to collapse. He falls face first into the soft bed, and it's possibly the most comfortable he's been in all his life. Loki is so at ease that he doesn't even feel the iron cuffs on his wrists or hear the knock at the door.

"The King wishes to see you," a voice, the chambermaid from his bath, announces. Loki turns to bury his head in the soft blanket and groans.

"Of course."

Thor sits on the throne like a true king, with Gungnir held loose in a slack hand. He no longer looks like a prince pretending. It's fearsome, in his own right, though Loki would be quick to deny it. At his side is Frigga, regarding him with a softer, but no less fearsome, expression.

Loki shifts his weight, hyper-aware of their gaze. It occurs to him that this is the first time he's seen Thor in nearly a month, not since his impromptu visit to his cell. He's angry, it's etched into every crevice of his face.

"Your Majesty," Loki greets. It's only the smallest bit sarcastic.

Not so very long ago, give or take a hundred years, Loki had stood at these very steps. He hadn't been met with a scowl, but a tender kiss to his knuckles. Loki half wonders what would happen if he extended his hand for the same treatment today.

"If you're to remain from behind bars, there will be restrictions and terms."

Ah. Straight to it, then.

"Now you're open to negotiating terms?" Loki asks cruelly. "Interesting."

Thor ignores him, but there's a slight twitch in his eye. "You'll have free range of your quarters and the garden, that is all."

Loki scoffs and bites at his lip to stifle back the venom that desperately wants to leak out. An upgraded cell, and a bit of fresh air. "I hear Asgard has a very nice library."

"We aren't bargaining, Loki."

Loki's heart constricts at the sound of his name on Thor's lips. Soft, defeated. Tired, probably of him. It's the crack of weakness he needs to squeeze just another drop of freedom from this deal. Thor may not be bargaining, but Loki very much is.

"I'll grow awfully bored," Loki says innocently. "Restless, even." He hopes he gets the implication. Loki can make him share this misery at will.

Thor stares at him hard, eyebrows creased in what seems to be a permanent scowl. Behind closed doors, in the presence of friends, Loki is willing to wager that isn't always so. He remembers a face of bright cheer, lost like a foggy memory.

Finally, Thor gives a resigned sigh.

“Your chambers, the garden, and the library. That is all.”

He’ll take it. Best not to press his luck. Loki won’t thank him though, and Thor surely knows that.

From beside him, Frigga lays a gentle hand on Thor’s shoulder. “One more thing,” she says. “You will join us for dinner once a week.”

Loki stiffens, and Thor twists the entire bulk of his body to face her.

“That isn’t necessary,” he protests at the same moment Thor hisses out a hoarse: *mother*.

“Loki is still a prince.” Her voice is stern, and she turns her eyes from Thor to the expanse of the throne room. There’s a silent challenge for anyone in the room to defy her proclamation, even Loki himself. “You can treat him as such for one night.”

A demand, not a suggestion.

“And you will dine with us one night a week,” Thor tacks on to the very short list of Loki’s privileges.

Before Loki turns to leave, escorted by heavily armored Einherjar, Thor slams the hilt of Gungnir onto the ground. The brassy ring echoes through the throne room and effectively stops everyone in their tracks. He looks upon Loki with an intensity to be felt in his bones.

“Loki Laufeyson, know that there will not be a breath I don’t know of while you remain in Asgard. Up until your very last.”

It’s funny that Thor assumes he’ll be there to see it.

As it turns out, the gardens aren’t far from the training grounds.

He hadn’t noticed during his first visit to Asgard, too busy being toted around as an unknowing suitor. But, after days of wandering the same path again, and again, Loki decides to test the true boundaries of his imprisonment. He creeps along the edge of the training area. It’s empty, but the air is thick with unsettled dust from someone scuffling against the dry ground.

He finds Thor by the trough of water, rinsing dirt from his skin. Shirt off with every muscle of his arms and back rippling with a sheen of sweat. It’s an involuntary reflex that Loki’s mouth goes dry. He hates him, yes. But he isn’t blind.

“You shouldn’t be here,” Thor warns without ever turning around. He towels off the water splashed on his face and reaches back to tie his hair.

“I must have got lost.”

“Feel free to get lost elsewhere.”

Loki hasn't seen him since their very uncomfortable dinner with Frigga. Thor was just as dismissive, barely making eye contact and saying all of three words, none directed at him. Loki had been left to quietly spoon soup into his mouth to smother the tension. Since then, Thor has successfully avoided him.

And he isn't going to let that happen forever. At the very least, provoking him will prove to be entertaining.

Before he can conjure a barb annoying enough to jab, Thor turns to him, slinging his training satchel over his shoulder. “It's by my mother's grace you're allowed out here at all. Move.”

Loki doesn't move, not an inch. He steps forward, more directly in Thor's path.

“And, it's by my clever planning that I'm alive at all.”

Something unreadable flashes across Thor's face. Loki turns his head in curiosity, trying to decide that look in his eyes. It's not contempt, and it's not fondness. Some strange concoction of the two.

Thor purses his lips, and shoulders past him. Loki moves with the flow of motion, blinking and straight-faced.

“Whatever you chose to believe, Loki.”

Loki stands there in the middle of the empty arena much longer than strictly necessary. Finally, he turns, red eyes narrowed at Thor's retreating back as he hefts himself up the stairs.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Loki calls out but gets no reply. He follows him up the stairs, finally catching up to Thor's enormous and quick steps. “Hey!”

No response.

Loki reaches out and gets a hold on Thor's shoulder, the heat blossoms on his naturally cool skin, and he jerks his hand back in response. That works. Thor turns around, and suddenly Loki is at a loss of words. He stands there, motionless and speechless, unsure of what to do with Thor's attention now that he has it.

Seconds of awkward silence pass by before Thor drags his hand down his face. Up close, Loki can see how tired he is. There's a little scar above his brow that wasn't there before and his finger's hum to reach out and touch it.

“Loki,” Thor finally says in a drawn-out sigh. “Let it go. You have your freedom—”

“Freedom?” Loki asks. Unbelievable. “You call this freedom?”

“What more do you want?”

Loki sucks in a breath at Thor's audacity. What does he want? He wants the Casket, he wants to know his people are okay, that his brother is alive. He wants these damned manacles off. He wants to fix everything he broke. He wants the foresight to know his father's plan's success was jeopardized by the need for revenge.

Deep down, he wants to be forgiven. But he doesn't say any of that. What would it do?

Thor can't give him any of those things.

So, he says nothing.

Thor turns to leave again, and Loki is fully intent on letting him. He gets as far as a few feet before turning back around, shoving a finger into the center of Loki's chest, pushing him back with the sheer surprise of it.

“You know what, Loki? You're a constant reminder of my first failure as King. To Asgard, and Jotunheim. A wretched ghost of my past mistake. I was trying to do something good,” he grits out from between clenched teeth. Every sentence is punctuated by another jab of his finger. He stares at Loki, chest heaving, and Loki stares right back. He hadn't been afraid on the battlefield, and he's not afraid now.

Thor can't hurt him.

He searches Loki's face for something, shoulders sagging when he recovers nothing. Loki isn't sure what he's expecting to find. There isn't anything there anymore.

“Go haunt someone else,” Thor sighs, defeated, and only then does he turn to leave.

Loki lets him go.

act iii.ii

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

While he is still tethered to the palace, Loki discovers that his chain is actually quite long. It seems a fair stretch of the courtyard constitutes as the “garden”, and he spends a lot of his time testing those boundaries. Not once does an Einherjar appear to drag him back.

Loki can’t decide if this is fortunate or suspicious.

He hasn’t run into any trouble— save Thor, who is always trouble where Loki is concerned. A shame, really, he does *like* a bit of trouble. Without it, his days crawl by dry and boring.

That’s the only reason he seeks Thor out.

And, it’s only from his last visit that Loki knows Thor will be in his chambers this early in the day. If he’s timed it right, he should be just finishing up his morning meal.

Loki slips through the hallways relatively unnoticed, from what he can tell. A few handmaidens and kitchen boys exchange looks, but none dare to approach him.

Afraid, probably, and rightfully so.

Loki waits until he sees a chambermaid leave with an armful of Thor’s linens before he moves from behind a pillar, stealthy as a cat. He catches the door seconds before it slams shut and lets himself in. The room is quiet, and empty. But, as he strains his ears, he picks up the faintest conversation drifting in from the balcony.

Loki’s interest is officially piqued.

His years spent training with Jotunheim’s mightiest warriors has prepared him to sneak about with great agility. Weaving in and out of the legs of giants requires grace and for one to be light on their feet. It’s because of this, Loki is able to find a place by the open door, behind a curtain, quickly and unnoticed.

“He’s impossible,” Loki hears Thor say.

“He’s stubborn,” Frigga corrects. Loki would recognize her lilted, bell voice anywhere. “There is a difference.”

“Is there?”

“You must try to understand,” she says, impatience evident. “His position was delicate and difficult.”

Oh, so they *are* talking about him. Not that Loki really had a doubt. He shifts closer, pulling back the thick curtain to better eavesdrop. He wishes he could see their faces, expressions gave away everything.

This would be a lot easier if he could access his seidr. A simple charm and he would be an invisible fly on the wall.

“Delicate?” Thor asks. “*Difficult*? I offered Jotunheim a way out. I offered my hand, he would have

been Consort to the King of Asgard.”

“Perhaps he simply wanted to be Loki, Prince of Jotunheim.”

Loki’s heart seizes in his chest. It’s one thing for Frigga to appear cordial to his face, but there is something else entirely in hearing her defend him behind closed doors. Perhaps there is one decent thing in Asgard, and it resides in her.

“A simple no would have sufficed,” Thor grumbles. He sounds bitter, which he often does, so Loki elects to ignore it. “Instead, we were reduced to this.”

A long silence settles over them, thick enough to cut with a blade. It’s Frigga who breaks it. “I know you didn’t want this, my son.”

Didn’t want this? Loki thinks, and has to hold back from physically insterting himself into this conversation.

Thor chose to declare war! He’s the one who marched troops into Jotunheim; he’s the one who couldn’t let Loki go. Tracked him in the midst of battle to strike him down! So, what *didn’t* he want? The bond? It’s a little too late for that. Loki will never lift it, if only out of spite.

Speaking of, he calms his anger so that it doesn’t seep through and give him away.

“It’s a mess,” Thor is saying. Loki can picture him now, rubbing those calloused hands over his face. Rubbing at his stubbled jaw the way he does when he’s tired. So predictable. “If father hadn’t —”

Loki leans closer. This is the first he’s heard mention of Odin in some time.

“I know,” is all Frigga says, sympathetic.

Absolutely unhelpful.

Loki sighs and sags back against the wall. The rest of their conversation is dull, at least to his standards. He doesn’t glean much from it and waits impatiently for them to wrap it up so he can make his escape. When they finally enter the room, Frigga with her arm looped through her son’s, they chatter mildly while heading to the door. In the threshold, Frigga stops and looks to the seemingly empty room. Loki stops breathing altogether.

After a beat, she leaves quietly and without any disturbance.

Loki lets out a slow breath. When he’s sure he’s alone, he slips out as undetected as he slips in. He doesn’t linger in Thor’s chambers, doesn’t take note of all the little artifacts and belongings that make it his. Not until he sees a rather heavy, old tome with familiar runes on a desk. On impulse, Loki takes it, tucking it beneath his arm and disappearing into the hallway.

The library is almost always empty. Loki figures either Asgardians can’t read, or the occupants of the palace aren’t equipped with as much free time as he is. He knows it’s the latter, but the first

option amuses him greatly.

All in all, it's a perfect place to read a book without being suspicious.

Loki pulls his swiped text from beneath his arm, laying it on the table carefully. It's old and fragile, but one look at the tarnished gold title has an ache blossoming in his chest. He runs his fingers over it carefully, chest swelled with an emotion he can't quite name.

Jotunheim: Biology and Geography.

Loki looks around, making sure he's alone, before opening up the cover. Inside he finds a two-page spread illustration of Jotunheim in its prime. The old castle of ice towering in the horizon, dunes of snow painted purple and pink beneath the light of the Morning Star. It's been a lifetime since he's seen Jotunheim covered in light or ripe with life. The removal of the casket had submerged his home into perpetual darkness.

He stares at the page for a long time, trying to conjure a memory of Jotunheim looking like this. The war had been in full swing when he was born, ending when he was still a child. It didn't take long after his father's return, empty-handed, for the Morning Star to die and with it, everything else.

Something possessive takes root in him. Why does Thor have this? He doesn't deserve to see Jotunheim in her glory. A glory that Asgard, and by association, *he* took away.

He flips to back, scanning the library ledger for names and dates. Thor is not listed once, but twice. One date stamped before the second war, around the time Loki came for his diplomatic mission, and the other weeks ago. He frowns and looks the book over, noticing indentions of dog-eared pages in the spine.

The first bookmark is a spread of native plant species, half of which Loki doesn't recognize. In the bottom left, one is circled in black ink. It's a beautiful plant, with light leaves, and a dark blue blossom. He reads the blurb next to it, fully expecting to find it contains a toxin to be used in some sort of weaponry. Probably Thor wanting to brush up his survival skills in the Jotunheim wilderness previous to their raid.

Loki finds no such thing.

No, instead he finds a paragraph detailing the aroma and the planting season and conditions. The only remarkable note being that it's a popular flower to plant in gardens and that Jotunheim's royal garden featured them heavily. Loki remembers no such flower but, *still*. Why would this insignificant plant be highlighted in Thor's reading?

He blinks down at the page, suddenly struck with a memory.

It's of Thor, in the greenhouse, telling Loki how his mother fills the space with species from all the realms. Absent, of course, of one. Loki traces the petals, his blue fingers complimenting the illustration. Two species belonging to the same world, so very far from home.

Had Thor intended to add this flower to the garden? He surely knew there were none left.

No longer intent on dwelling on such a sentimental hypothetical, Loki flips to the next bookmark. He finds this one to be much more straight-forward in meaning. A figure of a full-grown Jotun, naked and detailing the anatomy of their dual-sex reproduction. Loki slams the book closed, face purple and heart skipping.

That's enough.

He debates on hiding the book in the library, among countless others. In the end, he closes it and tucks it back under his arm, taking it to his chambers. If nothing else, he can read it when he's feeling particularly homesick.

He doesn't think of Thor skimming the pages, circling flowers, and learning of the intimacies between his legs. He doesn't.

Loki spends the next few days in a haze, mostly confined to his room. He hates the revelation the book brought. That Thor had been very thorough in his attempts to make Loki feel at home when he first arrived.

He was only trying to woe you, Loki tries to remember. He was only trying to charm his way out of the consequences of a war Asgard waged.

Loki was only ever meant to be like the flowers in the greenhouse, stolen from their home and put on display.

Or, so he tells himself.

It doesn't take long for him to once again grow restless.

He dresses himself in the lightest tunic available to him, simple dress with breeches and belt on his waist. He would much rather go topless, summer was creeping up and Asgard was already so hot, but the residents of the palace could hardly handle his blue skin, red eyes, and horns, fully clothed. Walking around half-dressed would surely make them combust.

Though a bit uncomfortable, Loki strolls around the garden, thankful for the breath of fresh air and change of scenery. It's relatively peaceful, with only the sound of light wind and chirping birds carrying in the air.

Until it's not.

The brass ring of a practice sword against metal rings out, and Loki finds his feet carrying himself toward the sound on their own accord. He knows who he will find there, and he knows that he shouldn't go.

Loki has never been one for doing what he *should*. The alternative is much more fun.

"Don't you have a hammer?" Loki calls out as he descends the stairs to the training arena. Thor is alone, as he often seems to be, slashing away at a tin practice dummy.

He stops long enough to look over his shoulder, see Loki, and roll his eyes. "What do you want,

Loki?" Another swing, this one with more force than it's predecessors.

Great question. What does he want?

"It would be much more beneficial for your opponent to fight back, wouldn't you say?"

Thor says nothing, and Loki now knows what he wants.

"Spare with me."

Thor falters mid-swing, and turns around, looking at Loki as if he's gone mad. Perhaps he has. It's hard to say these days. All he knows is fighting Thor will allow some much-needed release of tension.

"What?"

"You heard me," Loki says calmly. "Spare with me."

Thor doesn't hesitate. "No," he replies, and then after a pause: "Absolutely not."

"Why not? Don't say you haven't thought about it," Loki purrs, trying to entice and stroke that bone of fury he knows Thor has. He's seen it, on the battlefield. Rage.

"Oh, I have." Thor grins, and Loki returns it. Both are a threat and a dare.

"Come on." Loki reaches out and tugs at the sword, Thor lets it slip from his hands, and he tosses it to the ground. "No swords, that's not fair. Hands only."

There is a part of Loki that isn't sure he's talking about fighting anymore. The air between them is thick with something other than dust and heat. Electricity, a spark that threatens to burn. There is so much adrenaline beneath Loki's skin, he isn't sure what it is that his hands want to do.

He goes with his initial instinct and swings his fist, aimed directly for that proud smirk on Thor's lips. A punch that Thor dodges with infuriating ease.

Thor laughs, and Loki snarls.

"Stop," Thor says with cocky confidence, dodging another ill-timed blow. "I don't want to make you look bad."

"As if you could make me do anything."

It's a shame his practice is primarily in seidr-weaving. He hates to admit Thor has more experience in any area, especially melee combat. But he only dodges expertly, never once attempting to fight back. It makes Loki appear inept when he knows he's not.

His blood boils.

"Fight me!"

Another graceful dodge, this time sending Loki stumbling forward when Thor side-steps out of the way.

"Haven't we done that enough?"

Instead of his fist, Loki swings with the intent of knocking him in the head with the hard surface of

the manacle on his wrist. Before he can bring his blow down, Thor has grabbed the discarded sword, and the iron cuff clangs against it.

"Whose fault is that?" Loki hisses. Both of theirs, he knows, but he'll never admit that to anyone. Especially not Thor.

"You're the one who risked everything for a relic!" Thor pushes Loki back with the sword and tosses it to the ground. Foolish move, considering Loki is ready to kill him. "For what? A symbol of Jotunheim."

That's what the Casket is to Thor. Just another relic.

Loki forfeits his plan of actually landing a hit with Thor, and moves on to plan B. He lunges himself forward and finds it much simpler to tip Thor off balance when he has his legs wrapped around his waist and bears down with his full weight. They fall, tumbling to the ground in a cloud of dust. Loki takes his momentary advantage of being straddled across Thor's chest to haul back his fist and strike with every ounce of his strength.

And, that is when Loki learns of the two-way nature of their bond. Heat blossoms in his cheek the second his fist connects with Thor.

He sits back, so startled, hand flying to his aching jaw, that he hasn't the reflex to stop Thor from flipping him over. His back slams into the hard ground, and suddenly Thor is on top of him. It's too familiar, they've been here before.

Except, instead of Thor snarling with Mjolnir held above his head, he's sitting back on his haunches and shaking with laughter.

Which, somehow, is much worse for Loki's pride.

"Get off me," Loki growls, embarrassed, and bucks him off. Thor, still laughing, falls beside him, on his back with his hands holding his sides.

"What did you think would happen?" Thor asks, wiping a tear from his eye. "You really aren't as clever as you think."

Loki stays silent, infuriated, staring pensively at the sky. He blames the shared bond, their connection, when he feels his steely demeanor crack and a chuckle slip through.

Then another, and another, until they both lay in the dirt in a fit of laughter.

He's not even sure what it's about. The fact that he really thought he could hurt Thor, that the bond would for some reason excuse his violence and allow him this? Or, just the entire mess of a situation in general? The one that isn't really funny.

It's nice though, to feel something other than anger. He needs this, if only for the moment. It feels good to let it go.

When their laughter subsides, and all that's left is the calming sound of nature, Loki turns his head to Thor, only to find he's already being watched. There's still a smile lingering on his lips, it's a small hint of a thing. Loki's stomach flips all the same.

"I'm sorry," Thor says. Vague in context, but it sounds sincere.

Loki opens his mouth, but the words seem to be stuck on his tongue. To say it's okay would be a

lie, and for once he's not keen on the idea.

So, the truth it is.

"I should go."

The smile vanishes from Thor's face, but is instantly replaced with one Loki recognizes as artificial. Polite, but not real.

"Of course," Thor says. He hauls himself up, dusting off the dirt from his training clothes. There's a hesitation before he offers his hand to Loki in assistance.

It's only because he's sore and out of practice that Loki takes it.

Chapter End Notes

a lot of you are upset with thor, and rightfully so! but i think it's important to remember that loki is a very unreliable narrator. :) thank you all for your feedback so far, and for sticking with this story. it really means a whole lot to me!

act iii.iii

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The table, usually set for three, is only set for two. Loki takes his seat at the opposite end of Frigga and pointedly looks at the empty spot to his left.

“Will Thor not be joining us?”

“There are some rather tedious affairs he needs to attend to,” Frigga says. There’s a small, curious smile on her lips as she takes a sip of her tea. “I thought you might be relieved.”

“Oh,” Loki says rather dumbly. “I am, of course. I only wanted to know if he would be joining us later to upset my meal.”

Fortunately, the universe is smiling on him, because said meal is sat in front of them before Frigga can call his bluff. There’s something knowing in the way she looks at him, like he’s utterly transparent. He knows she’ll have no problem calling the feeling in the pit of his stomach for what it is.

Disappointment.

It’s just that they’d seemed to break ground the day before. He’s not entirely sure what that matters, but the image of Thor laying beneath the afternoon sun, beaded with sweat and looking up him so intently, is still lingering in his mind. He only needs to be reminded that Thor is, in fact, a selfish brute.

He shouldn’t be forgetting that. Why does he keep forgetting that?

“Prince Loki,” Frigga says, jarring him from his thoughts. He realizes he’s been staring at his dinner in a zoned-out silence.

“Just Loki is perfectly fine.”

He’s not a prince anymore.

“There is something I’ve been meaning to ask you,” Frigga says, thoughtful and careful. It feels as though a stone drops to the pit of his stomach. There are a plethora of questions that could be asked. None that Loki particularly wants to answer.

“Of course,” he replies, poking at some sort of baked fish. His appetite is suddenly gone.

“Why risk this all for the Casket?”

The only sound in the dining hall is the clatter of Loki’s utensil as it drops to the table. It’s the one question that has the most obvious answer. Perhaps Frigga isn’t as caring as she lets on. She wishes to hear Loki recount the failure and death of his people by the hands of Asgard.

“Surely you know the answer to that,” Loki answers, with as much of a level voice as he can muster. He plants his fork into the fish, only because it feels nice to stab something.

When she doesn’t reply, he gives out a frustrated sigh. He shouldn’t be so callous with the only person that’s shown him any hospitality.

If she wants an answer, fine.

“The Casket of Ancient Winters is the core of Jotunheim. It serves as a weapon, yes, but only in the most desperate of times. Its removal has broken our realm. Our people are dying, our world is crumbling.” Loki takes a deep breath to steady himself. He will not let them win, he will not let them reduce him to tears. “I was only trying to save my home. That is worth all the risk.”

He’s so caught up in his explanation, he doesn’t immediately notice the shift on Frigga’s face. The quite concern morphing to unimaginable sympathy. It catches him so off-guard the he doesn’t pull away when she reaches across the table and takes his hand.

“I’m sorry,” she says, and Loki balks at her audacity. A simple sorry isn’t what Jotunheim needs, and she knows it. “I was afraid of that.”

Loki pulls his hand back, blinks. “Afraid of what?”

“The truth.”

Another truth clicks into place.

“You didn’t know?” Loki asks. Her face tells everything as she shakes her head, eyes glistening. She didn’t. “How?”

“I had my suspicions, I’m ashamed I didn’t investigate them further years ago, when it would have counted.” She puts down her fork, abandoning her meal as he had. It seems neither of them is in the mood to eat.

The silence stretches. For once, Loki finds himself at a complete loss of words.

“My husband hides many secrets. Not only from me, but also Asgard,” Frigga tells him. She speaks slowly, and with great caution, her intense stare keeping him still with rapt attention. “And from Thor.”

“He didn’t know?” Loki’s heart hammers in his chest, every nerve on fire with growing anxiety.

This can’t be— how can one realm be so ignorant of another? How can the King of Asgard not know he holds the very fate of an entire race in a locked vault?

“I can’t speak for Thor,” Frigga tells him. He wishes she would reach out again, he longs to feel a steady hand on his. Anything to calm the quake beneath his skin. “But,” she continues. “I can tell you that I know my son’s heart, and it is kind. Willfully foolish at times, but only with good intentions.”

Loki can’t even produce a sharp barb, his tongue turned to jelly. He wants to believe her, and there is a part of him, buried far beneath layers of contempt and blame, that does.

“I need to go,” Loki says, shoving himself from his chair. It’s no way to exit dinner with the Queen, but he hardly has the mind to care.

“He’ll be tied up with preparations all evening.”

He turns to her and she offers him a small smile. Of course, she thinks he’s running to Thor—which he absolutely does intend to do— but there is something else first.

“Thank you,” Loki tells her, before walking out. Once he’d in the corridor, he runs.

Loki finds the book on Jotunheim exactly where he left it: hidden beneath his bed. He frantically flips to the table of contents, finds the page number, and flips to fifty-six.

He leans back on his haunches, dumbstruck, and blinks down at the open book.

Unless he's forgotten the correct order of Asgardian numbers, the pages go from fifty-five to sixty-one. Loki picks the book up and exams it to find tears in the crease. Tears where pages should be.

They're gone.

He scours the library for hours. Books on Jotunheim are few and far between, but every single one Loki finds is missing a very key component.

The Casket of Ancient Winters.

Some texts mention it briefly but it isn't easily found and doesn't hand over a lot of information. The only solid chunk Loki finds details the uses as a weapon— something that's rarely done. He flips to the back of the book and the ledger is scarce. No ones checked it out for hundreds of years.

It raises questions. The main one being—

Where is Odin?

And, not as mysterious, but weighing no less heavy on Loki's heart—

Where is Thor?

Despite sleep not finding him easily, Loki wakes with the morning's first peek of sunlight. He bolts from bed, already dressed, having slept in his clothes. His reflection shows him worn with sleep. He untangles a mess of dark hair from one horn and attempts to sooth the jumble of curls using his fingers as a comb.

Good enough. Not enough time.

If he's quick, he'll meet Thor in his chambers before his morning meetings. He all but sprints down the hallways, trying to not look so panicked or anxious. They all believe he's up to no good anyway, it'll be better not to get thrown back to his quarters because an Einherjar finds him too suspicious.

He shouldn't forget he's still a prisoner.

When he arrives at Thor's room, slightly out-of-breath, he finds it empty. A chambermaid is making his bed, smoothing out the pelts of fur and fluffing the pillows. She startles when she catches sight of him, a hiccup in her humming.

"Prince Loki, I'm afraid Thor has gone to bathe."

Relief floods him. There's still time. He cranes his neck to peek at the door leading to Thor's private bathing chambers. It's open and very noticeably empty.

"Oh," the chambermaid says, watching Loki stare into the bathroom with laser precision. "He prefers the commons. Much larger, you see."

He thanks her, and she nods with owlsh eyes, watching him speed off from the door.

Loki is fairly certain he remembers where the community bathhouse is from his previous visit. Thor had shown him once in a tour, and Loki had made a suggestive comment about how many people could fit in such a tub. A lifetime ago, yet Loki's feet take him there all the same.

There is a willowy line of steam rolling from the crack in the grand double door. Loki leans heavy against it, ear pressed to the cold iron and listens to the running water and faint sound of splashing. He's made it.

Now, to wait, but...

If he's forced to wait another second dwelling on this, he may go mad. There's so much to rectify if Frigga is right— if Thor didn't know the true purpose of the Casket...

Well.

Loki has to know the truth.

He opens the doors in a moment of unabashed adrenaline, steam rolling out in waves until it settles and clears to reveal a very startled attendant and even more startled Thor, who quickly gathers the suds floating atop the water to cover himself.

Loki would laugh if he wasn't so embarrassed. He knows he's purple from his head to his toes. But he coughs, clears his throat, and acts like he's meant to be there.

"What are you doing?" Thor asks, sinking further into the water. At the same time, the attendant rushes over in an attempt to escort Loki out.

Desperately, Loki ducks from the guiding touch and squirms his way in further to the room.

"I'm here to bathe," he announces with a hefty dose of false confidence. He strips his tunic from his body and tosses it over his shoulder, effectively covering the entirety of the attendant's face.

"You have your own bath!" Thor protests, but Loki doesn't listen.

His pants come next, and as he chances a glance at Thor, his face is red and turned to the opposite wall. At least he's sparing Loki the humility of this ill-conceived plan.

The water is hot when Loki steps inside. There is a lavender scent wafting through the muggy air as he sinks down beneath the suds as far away from Thor as possible.

The bath is large enough to fit a dozen grown Asgardians, but it still feels too close.

The attendant, freshly free from his linen prison, rushes over but Thor stops him with a wave of his hand. “Let him stay,” he mumbles before adding, “Erik, please leave us.”

That earns them both a withering and defeated look, but Erik, the loyal servant, obeys Thor’s wishes and leaves.

When the door shuts, they seem that much closer.

Thor sighs, great and heavy. His cheeks are still red, from embarrassment or the near-boiling temperature of the water, Loki can’t be sure. He looks nice like this, peaceful, almost. Much closer to the sunny-faced youth that Loki remembers. His golden mop of hair is pulled back and into a bun to stay off his very naked chest.

Which, reminds Loki, he’s also *very* nude. He shifts the bubbles to hide whatever watery image he might be offering.

“I know you’re not here to bath,” Thor says, finally. “Why *are* you here?”

Loki looks up from his lap, facing Thor. The previous night had found him lying in his bed, staring at the ceiling, planning out a perfectly eloquent speech. Though, in that scenario, they had both been clothed. So, to Loki’s horror, he just chokes out something about the Casket that must sound like gibberish because Thor is looking at him with a twist of confusion.

“What?”

“The Casket,” Loki tries again. “What is it?”

Thor’s confusion turns to concern. He shifts forward, which has Loki instinctively shifting back, water sloshing around them. “Are you alright?”

“Yes,” he stammers out. He’s too hot all of a sudden, so he attempts nonchalance. “Why do you ask?”

“You,” Thor says slowly, “Loki of Jotunheim, just asked me, Thor of Asgard, what the Casket is.”

“Well?”

Thor sits back against the edge of the bath with a huff. Loki can suddenly breathe again.

“What is this about? You’re the one who found it worth enticing another war.”

Loki remains silent and steel-faced, but anger begins to replace the pleasant stir that had pooled in his gut.

Thor doesn’t know, he reminds himself. He wouldn’t say this if he did.

Is that the case though? Thor is just as warmongering and brutish as his father.

Loki’s thoughts falter. He knows that isn’t true.

“You called it a relic,” Loki says. “A symbol of Jotunheim. Is that all you see it as?”

Thor blinks, taken-back. It’s obvious he doesn’t understand the question.

“What more is it? Other than a formidable weapon?”

Two things happen at this moment: Loki lets out a deep breath and realizes Thor *doesn't* know. Then, he sees Thor very different light. A light, and a color, that he didn't know it possible to see. One that filtered through in waves so many years prior.

“You really don't know,” Loki muses, giddy almost. For what? Relief?

“Know what?”

Loki gives him a sad smile. “The Casket is more than a weapon, and it's more than a relic. It holds Jotunheim's very lifeforce. It's the core and epitome of our survival. Without it, we will die out.”

Thor stares at him in stunned silence, shaking his head slightly. His brows are pinched together in utmost concentration, and Loki itches to soothe the crease from between his eyes.

The blame is almost palatable. Heavy is the head that wears the crown, and so on.

“So, you see, that is why I had to retrieve it. Why I had to flee,” Loki says.

What he doesn't say is that he wishes fleeing hadn't been a necessary component.

“I don't understand. My father—”

“Fathers lie,” Loki bites out, cutting him off. He knows this as the truth. “Just as my father lied to me. He told me you were a blood-thirsty warrior who would rather see my head in a puddle by your hammer than return the Casket.”

Thor grimaces at the words, shrinking farther into the water. He looks so small, for someone so big. Ashamed, confused, and embarrassed. Loki stands, no longer burdened by his lack of clothing.

Three strides are all it takes to wade across the waist-deep water to him.

“Tell me you're lying,” Thor whispers once Loki is close enough to hear. “Please.”

Loki reaches out to touch the soft bristle of Thor's cheek, he flinches at the touch before leaning into it. Comfort has never been in Loki's nature, but he finds he wants to try.

“When you came to Jotunheim, what did you find?”

Thor closes his eyes, Loki's hand still a firm grounding cupped to his cheek. “Darkness,” he finally says. “A wasteland.”

Loki hums.

“It was war,” he chokes out. “I just thought—”

“You thought what you were told to think.”

Thor turns his head in Loki's palm, lips brushing against his skin and making him shiver despite the warmth of the pool. A hand raises from the water and wraps around Loki's bound wrists. Thor holds it tightly, blue eyes narrowed in on the shackle. It's a reminder that he's not to be trusted.

Loki the Betrayer.

“There's something I must confess,” Thor whispers, and Loki's heart races.

There's something Loki needs to confess too.

"I—"

"Your Majesty!"

Both turn in unison toward the sound. Two Einherjar and the attendant, Erik, stand in attention and with averted gazes. Loki pulls back and Thor turns away. His heart beats wildly against his chest, and Thor clears his throat.

"Yes?"

"You're needed. It's urgent."

"I'm in the middle of my bath," Thor says, exasperated. Though, from where they are standing, it must look like much more than that. Loki once again sinks below the water to cover himself.

"What does it concern?"

Erik shifts on his feet. Nerves, Loki notes. But why?

"Your father."

The bath goes cold. Loki watches as a carefully crafted mask pulls down over Thor's face.

"I'll be there at once."

A nod from Erik and they all turn to exit as quickly as they came. It leaves Thor and Loki both in a haze of awkwardness to stare at the ceiling, or the wall, or the water, as long as it's not at each other.

"I'm going to," Thor says, gesturing at himself and then the edge of the bath.

"Oh, yes, of course."

Loki closes his eyes and listens to the water slosh around as Thor heaves himself from the pool. It proves difficult to resist the urge to peek at what he knows must be a mouth-watering sight. But, if he is to rebuild the trust between them, he shouldn't start off by acting so lecherous.

Only when he's heard the telling sounds of clothing being pulled on, does Loki open his eyes.

"What did you want to tell me?"

Thor looks at him mild panic, and Loki crosses his legs, suddenly hyper-aware of his own nudity in comparison.

"It," Thor starts, licking his lips. "It was nothing. It can wait."

Loki nods. Disappointed, but for once, he agrees.

Odin has acted as a looming presence in Asgard, but out of sight. Any matters that concern him hold importance, and now Loki knows to listen extra close to the whispers in the hall.

He thinks to tell Thor of the ripped out pages but holds his tongue. Like everything else, it can wait.

Thor gives him a tight-lipped smile, seems to contemplate something, but ultimately stays silent,

nodding as a quiet farewell.

“Wait!” It takes a moment for Loki to register the voice as his own. Thor turns slowly at the door to face him. “Do you believe me?”

He opens his mouth, but nothing comes out. He just stares at Loki with a sadness in his eyes, and unreadable expression across his face. An unspoken response.

Loki feels his heart sink.

Thor leaves, and the cuffs around his wrists feel tighter. Loki doesn't know the answer.

Chapter End Notes

i told myself each chapter would be 1000 words long...this was 3000. rip me.

intermission

Chapter Summary

intermission: hope & yearning

Loki pulls himself out of bed at the sound of loud pounding on his chamber door. Gathering his thoughts from disorientation seems impossible.

The knocking continues.

He wanders to the source of the sound, grabbing his robe and wrapping it around his nightclothes. The air is chilly, and the only light filtering from the open window is the dim moon. It's late, too late for a visitor.

Unless something is wrong.

He pulls the handle open, completely powered by nerves and hypotheticals. Loki's heart stops to find Thor there, looking very much like he did on the battlefield of Jotunheim. Blood-splattered and angry, scuffed and bruised, wrapped in a tattered red cape.

Something *is* wrong.

"Thor?"

He says nothing, only breaths heavy with flared nostrils and ignited blue flame in his eyes.

"Thor?" Loki asks again, this time reaching out to put a hand on his trembling arms. A soothing touch to attempt to calm the storm. Thor only stares with a fierce intensity, but Loki feels no fear. "What's wrong?"

Silence is once again his only answer, but Thor takes hold of his wrists and walks him backward. For each step Thor takes forward, Loki stumbles back until his knees hit the back of the bed. Shutting his eyes tight, he lets himself fall, and fall, and fall. He hits the mattress with a soft bounce, and the feeling of a warm body hovering over him.

Loki opens his eyes to see a softer, younger Thor.

No blood, no scars, no dirt smudged flesh. His hair is braided back in a classic Jotnar fashion and his eyes are sparkling as he looks down at Loki with the fondest of expressions. Loki's heart aches in his chest, but strangely, nothing seems amiss.

Loki reaches to cup a stubbled cheek, only to notice the absence of metal on his wrists. He's unbound, he's free. Thor brings a hand up and places it over his own, and Loki no longer thinks about the cuffs or lack thereof.

He only sees Thor.

"You didn't know about the Casket," Loki says out loud. He remembers the Thor from moments ago, worn from battle and seething. "But you still followed me and brought war to my home."

The peaceful feeling morphs to anger.

“You still tried to kill me!” Loki shouts, and pushes at Thor’s chest where he hovers over him.

There’s no response.

Loki growls and shoves at him again, this time harder. Though he expects Thor to remain unmoving, he follows through with Loki’s force until they are flipped in position.

When Loki pushes his hair back from his face, straddling a thick waist, he looks down and sees yet another version of Thor. The Thor he knows now. Hair longer, beard thicker, crinkles in the corners of his eyes. Smile present but guarded.

Loki feels an overwhelming sense of sadness.

“I’m sorry,” he tells him, but Thor shakes his head. He’s not even sure what he’s apologizing for—there are so many things. Everything, perhaps?

“I’m sorry,” Loki says again.

Thor’s hands come to rest on his thighs, inching up the hem of his robe. He shouldn’t be feeling the warmth of Thor’s callous palm, but he does. Loki looks down where the robe has fallen open. His bare chest, blue and lined in the white scars of his heritage marks. There should be clothes there.

He’s glad there isn’t.

The hot, hard length beneath his hips is evident now, and the light strokes on the flanks of his thighs become peppered with purpose.

“Thor,” Loki breathes out.

Say something, anything.

Loki bends over him, takes Thor’s face in his hands. The iron of his manacles, restored to his wrists, glint in the candlelight. His gaze drops from them, without a second thought, to Thor’s lips, plump and welcoming. Lips that he would like to kiss.

What’s to stop him?

He brings their mouths together.

Loki bolts upright in bed, chest pounding and a strange turning in his stomach. He can almost feel the electricity lingering on his lips, and he presses his fingers to them.

It had only been a dream.

He takes notice of the ache low in his belly, and the stiffness between his legs.

A dream with *very* real repercussions.

Loki throws himself back down on the bed, arms spread far out from his sides, staring at the ceiling. Completely unwilling to acknowledge the tent he knows is further down.

He *isn't* going to touch himself to a dream about Thor. No matter how welcoming that touch had been in his conscience.

Yet, still his body thrums with want. One curious hand snakes its way down to his waistline, teasing there before traveling lower. Loki takes a deep breath, holds it, and flirts his fingers over his cock straining against the soft linen.

He can always think of someone else.

Loki lifts his hips and shimmies his sleep pants down, kicking them off. His cock, already hard from the dream, bobs against his stomach. He pushes any thoughts of said dream out of his mind, takes himself in hand, and pictures a faceless warrior. Big, tall, strong, and hands large enough to wrap all the way around him.

Loki bucks into his fist, running his fingers along the head to gather the pearls of precome beaded at the tip. The glide back down is much easier, and he imagines the things this faceless warrior would say to him.

He would call him beautiful, praise his body and his mind. Kiss along his neck and jaw. His hands would find their way into his hair and then his horns, tugging and guiding.

The voice in his head whispering eager encouragements sounds familiar, so he makes it shut up. Imagines rough hands exploring his body with wonder instead.

The friction on his cock feels amazing, but it's not enough. Loki slips his hand down farther, past the base until his fingers slip against the slick folds of his cunt. He bites back a gasp, muffles it behind his lips, and presses his head to the pillows.

It's both too much, and not enough. Overwhelming and lacking.

Loki pushes in with one finger, body clenching around it. He lets out a long, shaky breath at the breach. And, as he works himself open to add another, he closes his eyes and pictures his fingers belonging to someone else. Thicker than his own, rough with work but gentle in nature.

Someone with a head of blonde hair, hanging in front of his face, shielding himself from the truth of identity.

This could be anyone.

But, as Loki fucks himself into breathless pants and low whines, he knows exactly who he wants it to be.

Thor's name falls from his lips as his body coils tight in a blinding white, and releases. Loki's mouth opens in a silent cry, a sweat worked upon his brow as he watches himself tumble over. His fingers lazily work himself through it, cock twitching and softening in the mess it made low on his stomach.

Loki's chest heaves with a dawning realization, and mild panic sets in.

What if he pushed that through the bond?

It had been too much, overwhelming to his senses, Loki couldn't possibly focus. All his walls were down, and the only thing he could think of was *him*.

Loki's heart becomes a frantic tap against his ribs.

What if Thor knows?

He wipes his wet fingers against his sleeping pants as he pulls them back up. The mess on his stomach is more of a problem, but he sits up and strips himself of his shirt, using it as a makeshift rag.

Shame begins to settle rather quickly. Thor is still the enemy, he tells himself. It doesn't sound convincing.

So, what if Thor didn't know about the Casket? That doesn't change anything.

It does, a voice inside his head tells him.

It does.

Loki rolls over and pulls his fur pelt over his head, ignoring the dampness between his legs and the memory of a sweet release and a certain King of Asgard.

He doesn't chance falling back asleep, too afraid of being plagued with dreams featuring impossible moments with Thor.

act iv.i

Chapter Summary

act four: to the surface

“I’ve been looking everywhere for you!”

Loki closes his book, sits it in his lap and schools his face into something approaching bland.

Calm and reposed, don’t let him know the truth.

The truth being that Loki’s stomach flutters the closer Thor gets. Memories of hands and mouths in a distant reverie— he blocks them out, already feeling his cheeks purple.

Thor doesn’t look like he knows.

But, how would he react if he did? Angry, embarrassed, or...interested?

“I can only be at one of three places,” Loki replies, batting his eyes innocently.

Thor hums and makes a show of looking thoughtful. Loki has to bite back a smile.

“That’s true.”

It isn’t. They both know it.

Thor’s hold on the chain that binds Loki is slack, and he’s found he has closer to free range of the palace than intended.

It’s not as if Loki is a plausible threat. He would argue that he is, but with his seidr cut off, he can’t do any real damage. At least, he can’t attempt to steal the Casket again. There are no doubt more rigorous security measures put into place.

(Not that the Destroyer wasn’t arguably enough. Loki just happened to be cleverer and craftier with his seidr at the time.)

“But,” he continues, after Loki musters up the blandest look he can in response. “We should change that.”

“Oh?” Loki moves the book from his lap altogether, sitting just a little straighter. The sly, scheming smile on Thor’s face has definitely piqued his interest. “How so?”

“Let me take you to see Asgard.”

“I’ve seen Asgard.”

“You’ve seen the *palace*,” Thor laments. He holds out his hand and Loki studies it before cautiously taking him on the offer. He’s pulled up moments later, close enough to smell the lavender oil Thor bathes with. “Let me show you *Asgard*.”

Asgard, as bad as Loki hates to admit, is...nice.

The market is bustling with a voracious life. Peddlers shout from their stands, and Asgardians of all social ranks push past each other in the chaos. He isn't sure where to look first, finding it all fascinating, if not a bit overwhelming. Loki has been to other realms and hearts of cities, but none quite compare to Asgard in sheer enormity.

It would be easy to get lost, or perhaps, if one really wanted, *easy to escape*. The thought is fleeting and moot. Thor's hand burns warm where it's splayed along his back to guide him through the throngs of people. Loki doesn't give escape a second thought.

Besides, where would he go?

"Are you okay?"

Oh, he must have zoned out. Thor is looking at him from beneath the hood he wears with great and unnecessary concern.

"You look ridiculous," Loki tells him. "I'm just embarrassed to be seen with you."

Thor gives him a hearty laugh and tugs the shroud further around his face until only his eyes are left. "It's a disguise."

"A poor one," Loki says, with no real venom. They've fallen into easy banter, and it helps to smooth the rough edges still present around them. Plus, Loki has come to think Thor rather likes it. "What is a King who can't walk freely among his people?"

Asgard adores Thor. If he were to walk the streets, they would part way and bow at his feet. Surely Thor knows this, but his easy grin fades just a hair. Enough for Loki to take notice.

"You're right," he says, but his jolly tone seems insincere. "But today I would like to just be Thor."

Loki knocks his shoulder into his, and when Thor looks in his direction, he smiles.

The day goes by surprisingly fast, and Loki finds it's not a chore to spend hours in Thor's company. Their conversations are still guarded and limited to the ease of casual conversation, but it's pleasant, nonetheless.

Thor purchases them dinner from a stand selling meat shaved right off the roasted leg of some beast. It's gamey, and rich, and reminds Loki of the feasts they'd have when his brothers would

return home from hunts. Loki tells Thor this and his eyes shine with wonder, and then a hint of sadness.

They pass a jeweler stand, and Loki finds a fire opal pendant. He stands, fingers grazing over the smooth surface, his other hand finding the ring that now dangles on a chain on his neck. It doesn't fit his finger any longer. He's small for a Jotun, but not that small.

"I'll buy it for you," Thor says. He's already reaching into his pocket, and Loki holds out to stop him.

"No, that's alright."

"Let me, please."

Loki shakes his head, and Thor's face drops. It's a sweet gesture, but an unnecessary one. He reaches into the collar of his tunic, looping the necklace from over his head. Loki holds out the chained ring in his palm for Thor to see.

"I already have one," he explains, and then puts it back on, this time leaving it to dangle on the outside of his clothing.

"A ring," Thor says, rather dumbly.

"A necklace, now. It was given to me by someone very special." Loki touches where it lays hanging on his chest. "Someone I miss a great deal."

A flurry of emotions pass on his face, none of which Loki can name, before Thor's face decides on a tight-lipped smile. He turns away, suddenly very interested in the varying gemstone jewelry pieces on display. Loki watches him with curious patience, notices the slightest twitch of his lip and flare of his nostril.

Curious.

"My brother," Loki clarifies. "My eldest brother gave me the ring."

He turns to Loki, no longer a wilted rose.

Curious, indeed.

"Helblindi?"

It's been so long since he's heard his brother's name spoken out loud that it almost sounds foreign. Loki's head spins with the realization he'd doesn't even know if Helblindi survived the war. Was Jotunheim left kingless?

Was there anyone left at all?

"No," Loki answers. He tries to push those thoughts from his head. "Býleistr. He died in the First War."

Thor reaches down and gathers Loki's hands in his, he brings them both to his lips and gives the knuckles a soft, chaste kiss. Loki is so completely caught off-guard, he can do nothing but stare up at Thor with parted lips and bated breath.

"When I was a child, my father told me stories of the First War. He made it sound as though it was a great triumph for Asgard," Thor says. He seems to forget they are in a public market.

“I suppose it was.”

Loki should pull his hands away. He doesn't.

“No,” Thor whispers, more serious than Loki has seen him all day.

He's about to open his mouth— to say something foolish, that Loki is sure. He stops him with a click of his tongue and shakes his head. For once, Loki would like not to argue. There's no use in apologies. The First War is over, and the so is the Second.

No more wars.

“Buy me something sweet,” Loki says instead.

He's still trying to wash the taste off his tongue when Thor finally stops laughing.

“It couldn't have been that bad!”

“It tasted like sticks and mud,” Loki whines. He spits in the dirt once more for good measure.

“Maybe even worse.”

“It's a delicacy in Vanaheim,” Thor tells him as if that makes any difference. The tart was many things, but a delicacy was not one of them. Still, it had looked tempting and the brittle old woman running the booth had talked it up so much that Loki had been inclined to try it.

Looks can be deceiving.

He looks to Thor, wiping a tear from his eye, still in that ridiculous shroud.

But he already knows that. Doesn't he?

“I'm reconsidering my stance on Vanaheim's competency if they can't produce a good dessert.”

Thor's chuckle trails off into a pleasant hum. He stops walking abruptly, and Loki, who has been following him while being rather distracted, nearly stumbles into his back.

He corrects himself and straightens his posture with a dignified huff. Only then does he realize they've strayed from the commotion of the market. It's quieter and much darker than previously. He should really pay more attention.

“Here we are,” Thor says, and Loki isn't exactly sure where *here* is.

But, when he looks up, he realizes.

“Oh,” Loki breaths out.

Before him is the edge of Asgard. There's the drop-off to the blackness of space and above it, a plethora of stars and colorful, distant nebulae swirling like cosmic clouds. Its vastness is both

terrifying and awe-inspiring, and so beautiful that there's a tightness in his lungs.

"What do you think?" Thor asks quietly, unsure.

"I'm speechless."

"What an achievement," he teases.

Loki rolls his eyes, tearing his gaze away from the scenery laid out before him. He turns to Thor, whose looking at him with a strange sort of fondness. It's darker here, and the hood casts an annoying shadow on his face. Loki reaches up and eases it from his head, and Thor stands still watching his every movement until its dropped to his shoulders and Loki pulls back.

"There isn't anyone else around," Loki tells him. "We can just be Thor and Loki."

It doesn't happen suddenly, but more like a creeping truth coiling around them. That treacherous snake takes hold of Loki first.

They are close, mere inches apart. Alone and away from the prying eyes of the court. The edge of Asgard, the edge of the world. Just the two of them.

Loki finds himself leaning forward.

Thor coughs and turns away to face the expanse of the cosmos. And Loki is left leaning into empty space, blinking and flustered with his own idiocy.

Right.

He turns to stand facing out with Thor, completely content to bury that moment deep and lock it away.

No, he didn't just attempt to kiss Thor. That would be absurd.

They stay there, each in their own respective thoughts, for long-passing minutes. Loki attempts to think of anything other than Thor and fails miserably. He replays every fleeting instance where he thought Thor might still hold a flame for him, even if it were just the tiniest flicker of an ember.

Just earlier he had been so sure he saw jealousy—

"One day," Thor says, and Loki nearly jumps from his skin. He turns to him, and Loki is forced to meet his eyes, cheeks still burning in embarrassment. "You won't wear these cuffs."

He looks down at his wrists, confused. One, with how they have anything to do with *anything*. And, two, with the notion that they might one day be removed. He had assumed he would die with them.

"I don't understand."

Thor's hand comes to rest on the iron shackle suppressing his seidr, his greatest weapon. The touch is gentle, soft, and sympathetic.

"I need time, but these will come off."

The world around Loki is frozen, and his own pulse rings loud in his ears.

"You trust me?"

“I do.”

“You’re a fool.”

Thor’s face splits into a grin, and he can’t help but return it. The flutter in his chest is back, a warmth blossoming there.

And, because Loki is the true fool, he pushes that feeling through their shared bond.

As if acting on an instant reflex, Thor’s hand shoots from its light hold on Loki’s wrists, to cup at his face. Loki can feel Thor’s heartbeat where his wrist sits on his cheek. It’s quick, erratic, and electric. Just like his own.

“When they are off,” Thor says, licking his lips. “I will kiss you. If you’ll allow it.”

Take them off now, Loki thinks. But he only nods.

“I’ll think about it.”

That’s the truth, he knows he’ll think about it for days to come.

Thor, ever the gentleman, walks him to his chamber door. Loki has half the mind to drag him inside and try his best to make him reconsider waiting. All pretense has been thrown out the door. He no longer cares about shame or pride.

There was a time they stood in a similar threshold and Thor nearly took him on a cluttered desk.

He wonders if he could do that again.

“Would you like to come inside?” Loki blurts out, less than smooth.

Thor looks upon him with sparkling amusement. He opens the door wider and ushers Loki inside. He doesn’t follow.

“I better not.”

Loki tries not to visibly deflate. He sniffs back a disappointed pout, never mind that he’s been denied twice in one evening by someone he’s fairly certain wants him too. Thor has always been frustrating, to say the least.

“This is good night then.”

Thor smiles. “Good night, Loki.”

“Wait!”

Thor has almost shut the door, but turns around, lingering in the frame.

“You were going to tell me something,” Loki says. “The other day in the bath.”

The atmosphere shifts and Thor stands straighter. The way his entire demeanor changes has Loki's nerves on edge. Unsettling, in an eerie way.

"Not tonight," he says, softer than his rigid stance should allow. "We've had a nice day, let's not spoil it."

Too late for that.

Loki lets him go, and the door shuts louder than usual, echoing through the room. He doesn't bother with his nightly ritual to prepare for bed. There's no hair braiding or changing of clothes. Loki simply lays face-first on his bed with a tired huff, ignoring the pit in his stomach.

More secrets.

He begs sleep to find him. And it does, eventually.

Loki dreams of a world where there is no Asgard or Jotunheim. There is only Thor and Loki, and that's enough.

act iv.ii

Chapter Notes

half-edited as i fall asleep. please forgive any mistakes!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The sound of shuffling wakes him from a groggy slumber. Loki cracks one eye open to find his chambermaid, Dagny, he believes, struggling to carry something large, and gray, and exceedingly fluffy.

“Have you brought me a wolf?”

Dagny drops the pelt unceremoniously to the bed and ignores him. Upon further inspection, it looks familiar. He runs his fingers through the soft fur, until something clicks.

It’s a cloak, and not just any cloak, but the very one he’d been eyeing in the market.

“A gift from the King,” Dagny explains. “There is also a new outfit tailored for you. We used your old measurements, hopefully, you haven’t grown too much.”

He hums a response, and she gives a huff. Loki isn’t really paying much attention to what she’s saying anyway, all her words are gilded with annoyance. Instead, he stomps out the butterflies in his stomach as he pulls the cloak into his lap. In its movement, a piece of parchment slips from the interior lining.

Your old one was all but ruined. I know that there is no replacing something sentimental from your home, but I do hope you enjoy this one. I saw you eyeing in the square. If it’s any consolation, I think it will suit you nicely.

Thor.

Loki reads it once, and then twice. He traces his fingers over the careful swoops of Thor’s penmanship and folds the note up to tuck beneath his pillow. His face feels warm, and despite it, brings the fur to his face to rub against his cheek.

Dagny watches him, thoroughly unimpressed. It must kill her to see Loki receive such gifts from *King* Thor. So, for good measure, he throws it around his shoulders and asks her to fasten it for him. He can do it for himself, but its fun to watch her jaw tick.

“It’s not supposed to go over your sleep clothes,” she grumbles but obeys.

“Didn’t you say there was new clothing brought for me?”

He climbs out his bundle of covers, heavy cloak dragging behind him and goes to inspect his reflection, giving himself a twirl. It’s a nice fur, and the dark gray compliments his black hair. It

doesn't clash as a darker brown would.

Absently, Loki pushes a little gratification through the bond. He doesn't receive anything in return, but he hardly expects Thor to know how to manipulate it. If anything, maybe Thor will understand his appreciation for the gift.

"Would you like to try them on?"

He looks over to where she's standing, holding new leathers and linens. Something much more akin to his first visit's wardrobe. It'll be nice not to trapeze around the palace dressed as a commoner. He undresses but lets Dagny fasten and buckle the new outfit in all the right places, pleased to find his midriff remaining bare.

Loki stares at his reflection and it's like looking into a portal. A portal that, on the other end, holds himself but younger. Though now, his hair is a little longer, to his shoulders, but other than that, nothing has changed since his first visit. His skin is still blue, his eyes are still red, his horns still sit proudly on his forehead, and the white scars of his heritage marks still decorate his body in angular, ornate patterns.

There's something different though, something off.

He's no longer weighed down with the burden of revenge. He's much too tired for that and confident to say that mending his relationship with Thor has been the main relief of that heaviness.

Dagny comes up behind him and drapes the cloak back over his shoulders, reaching around to pin it in place. Loki's filled with an overwhelming warmth, and it's not from the fur he's wrapped in. For the first time in years, maybe even centuries, Loki feels as though things might be alright.

"You'll look very handsome for the ceremony," Dagny tells him, rather drily.

His heart skips a beat.

"Ceremony?"

She frowns, pulling at his hand to fidget with the seam of his sleeve.

"You'll be attending, won't you?"

He doesn't know. He's not even sure *what* he's supposed to be attending. But he would rather not appear ignorant to important happenings, so he gives a tight-lipped smile and nods.

"Of course."

He dismisses Dagny the moment she's finished making minor adjustments to the hem of one of his sleeves. She seems eager to go, and that's all the better. His mind hasn't stopped whirling and trying to fill in missing pieces that will add to the bigger picture of what exactly is going on.

Has he really strapped blinders onto himself? That he would drop his guard so magnificently as to

miss an entire ceremony?

There is only one thing he must do.

Loki leaves his chamber in a flurry of gray. It's strange how one wardrobe change alters his entire sense of self. No longer does he feel like a pauper playing pretend. It's as if his status has magically been restored as he struts through the grand halls, eyes peeled for any sign of tall, broad, and blonde.

He finds Thor soon enough, chatting breezily to a Lord that Loki doesn't recognize. His back is to Loki, but the innocent bystander sees him first, visibly startled. Thor turns, blinks, and then grins when he recognizes Loki for who he is.

"Might we have a moment?" Loki asks. It's not really a question, he'll have his moment regardless.

"Later, my friend," Thor tells the man, and the man tries for a humble smile. His eye bore into Loki though, betraying any semblance of causality he might have otherwise had. He leaves all the same.

Then, Thor's turning to him with his full and utmost attention. Those blue eyes sparkle as they take Loki in, shamelessly soaking up every detail of his outfit. His smile is so wide, it may split his face in two. Loki is forced to remind himself that he's supposed to be mad, that Thor has been keeping him distracted from something.

"You look wonderful," Thor is saying, and Loki revels in it. Confrontation can wait, he can use a compliment. Thor reaches out and pets a hand through the fur on his shoulder, touch lingering as a heavy weight there. "Do you like it?"

"I do," Loki says sweetly. He plucks Thor's hand from his shoulder and lets it drop. "I'm sure I'll be the talk of the town at the ceremony."

Thor's face drains of color.

Ah, there it is.

"Loki, I can explain."

"Can you?" Loki hisses, quiet so not to echo his anger through the halls.

"I was going to tell you."

His anger is rising now. Loki thinks back to the bath, and then to just last night. He doesn't even know what he was going to be told— but one thing is obvious, whatever it is, is big. Big enough that Thor is looking like he's seen a ghost and stuttering on his words.

"When were you going to tell me?"

Also, *what* are you going to tell me? But Loki doesn't ask that. Let Thor hand the information over on his own.

"Loki, please," Thor says quickly, grabbing hold of his hand. It's a wonder that Loki allows it, but he does. Thor squeezes his fingers in his palm, reassuring but full of worry. "When I am King, officially—"

Everything stops. His blood runs cold, his heart freezes in his chest. The only thing he can hear is

the tunneled roar of the world around him as he spins.

Thor stops talking, blanching yet again. Loki's face must give it all away.

"Loki," he starts.

No, he needs clarification.

"What do you mean *when* you are King?" Loki asks, and then for spite, spits: "*Officially?*"

"I can explain." Thor holds out his hands and takes a stumbling step back when Loki advances on him.

"You better start."

He may be cut off from his seidr, but the blinding anger pooling inside him would be enough to rip Thor apart.

"There may have been a small lie told when you first came to Asgard."

Loki practically screams, shoving at Thor's chest with all his might. Strong hands come to wrap around his cuffed wrists, holding him still and stopping him from beating his fists. He snarls and jerks in Thor's hold, but it's useless. If only he'd lean a little closer, Loki would ram a horn into him like a damn goat.

"You weren't King at all!" Loki shouts, and Thor attempts to hush him.

"I wasn't," Thor admits, and somehow that's more painful to hear. "I was on the verge of becoming one, but my father didn't think I was ready."

Loki lets out a disbelieving laugh.

"Oh? So, you what? Invited a Jotun runt to come over for you to wed?" Loki kicks out at him with a grunt, trying to wrestle free. "I can't imagine why your father didn't think you were ready!"

"I thought that perhaps in my parent's absence, if I were to unite Asgard with her oldest enemy, my father might reconsider."

Loki stops his feeble struggle. Thor looks down on him, his brows drawn into a guilt-ridden crease, and unexplainably, his urge to headbutt him dwindles.

"It was an ill-conceived plan of an arrogant boy," Thor says quietly. "The turmoil that followed is something I can never cleanse my hands of."

"What did you think was going to happen?"

Thor blinks at him, and the hold on his wrist turns slack. Loki still doesn't pull away, though he should. He is met with silence and a dumbfounded stare.

"Did you think I was going to agree to marry a king and be fine when I found out he wasn't a king at all?" Loki continues.

"Does it matter? You were only ever here for the Casket."

Loki's mouth snaps shut. Did it matter? It didn't. Loki was never going to let it get that far. No matter how many times he revisited that night on the balcony in his mind. They'd both held

secrets, some more venomous than others.

“And the whole court played your little game?”

“Well,” Thor says, for the first time his tone lighter, followed by a small chuckle. “Yes, I was still Crown Prince. There wasn’t much choice but to entertain me. Though, someone sent word to my mother shortly after.”

Loki hums lightly, his anger present but fading. It was almost laughable, really.

“And now? You are only pretending to be King. Playing a grand joke on your Jotun prisoner?”

Thor’s face hardens, gaze darting back and forth where it rests on Loki. “No, my father fell into the Odinsleep some time ago. I have been acting as King in my father’s absence since the end of the war. But, tomorrow, that will be no more.”

A hand comes to cup Loki’s cheek, guiding his gaze up. There are questions that he desperately needs answers to, and that he will certainly get— one way or the other. But, for now, he’s content to listen to what Thor has to say.

“When I am King of Asgard,” Thor says, wetting his bottom lip with a poke of his tongue. “I swear to you, I will do everything I can to make this right.”

Loki shouldn’t believe him. He *shouldn’t*.

He covers Thor’s hand with his own and squeezes.

He does.

Chapter End Notes

don't worry, that's not the end of this conversation. /sweating

act iv.iii

Chapter Summary

warnings: mild violence

He sees it now— the chaos in the halls and the panicked steps of the palace servants, all of them scrambling to get the last-minute coronation underway. It wasn't shortly after Thor made impossible promises, that he was ushered away leaving Loki to juggle all his questions himself.

First being, how does he feel?

He doesn't know, it's not an easy situation to wrap his head around. There'd been anger, sure. He'd thought Thor was purposely keeping him distracted to—what? He had no idea at the time.

A wedding? A new declaration of war?

Coronation had never crossed his mind until Thor looked at him so apologetic and let the truth slip from his lips.

Then, what? Humiliation.

Humiliation at the fact he'd been brought to the palace under false pretenses, by a false king. Led to believe he was to make headway with bridging peace! And the whole court, what? Just played along, probably laughing behind his back and what a fool he was. While Thor—

A pang in his chest. Thor.

Thor had pretended to be smitten for a chance at peace and the throne, the only thing he truly wanted.

Loki stops and plasters himself against the cold, stone wall. He's alone in the hall, and he feels out his heart with his hand. It beats frantic against his palm. Things are spiraling, and now, so is the room, and so is he.

That's where it stems from, isn't it? All this anger and confusion. The realization he'd only ever been a pawn for Thor to take the crown. Which, in itself, is selfish and childish jealousy.

Thor had only ever been playing the same game as Loki.

It's easy to forget his own transgressions when Thor's are so newly surfaced. He must remember he came to Asgard with false-intent. Purposely charming and weaseling his way into all the cracks until he found what he was looking for—and took it. Left Thor to feel the wrath of a failed plan and angry father.

Oh.

Loki stands straight, blinks into nothing.

Thor was not king.

Though the letter declaring war came at Thor's hand, he was not king. A prince, yes, but still at mercy of Odin Allfather and his orders. Loki remembers an overheard conversation, with Frigga softly telling her son that she knew he didn't want this.

And suddenly, not even the fact that Thor concocted a poor plan, with an even poorer execution, can taint the overwhelming relief he feels. The part of him that feels guilt every time he thinks of Thor in favorable light crumbles in his chest.

Loki knows why he trusts Thor, even when his entire upbringing tells him he shouldn't. Thor is good. Flawed, and stubborn, and lacking finesse in his reckless planning— but good, all the same.

"Prince Loki?"

Frigga watches him a few feet away, head tilted in concern. Loki rights himself, he can't imagine how he looks, leaned against the wall with his hand clutching his heart. She may wheel him off straight to the healers.

"I was only catching my breath." Not a complete lie.

She doesn't seem to believe him but nods anyway, sweeping by in a billow of yellow robe. He watches her pass, and then pause, turning toward him ever so slightly, the corner of her mouth quirked into the faintest smile.

"Walk with me."

It's not a question, and not yet a demand, but circumstances tell him he doesn't have a choice in the matter. Loki falls into step with Frigga, as she guides him down the hall. Perfect poise and posture, not a hair or braid out of place on her head. For once he doesn't feel like a commoner next to her, but the two of them figures of royalty.

"I assume you know by now," Frigga says, as they turn a corner to a wing Loki doesn't recognize. "Of Thor's coronation?"

"Yes."

"And are you angry with him?" She cuts her eyes to him, she wants the truth. It's the least he can give her.

"I was, at first. I think it was my pride that was angry. To be lied to."

"You both did a great deal of lying," she muses. There is no malice present, as if she's merely stating the obvious.

Which, Loki supposes she is. It's one of the reasons he's able to forgive Thor so easily.

They stop in front of two large double doors, gilded in ornate filigree. "Here we are," Frigga announces.

Loki is just about to ask where *here* is when Frigga nods to the two Einherjar guards and they step aside to grant her access. He follows her, curious, but hesitant, to an open and nearly empty room bathed in golden light.

He's not sure what he is expecting to find—but it's not the Allfather lying in bed, shrouded in a barrier of some sort of misty protection spell. Flecks of yellow light obscure him, but Loki knows. He can feel the existential pit of dread in his stomach while looking upon him.

“Why have you brought me here?” Loki is surprised by how steady his words come out.

Frigga moves to stand by Odin’s sleeping form. She picks at her hand as she regards him in quiet solitude. It’s a strange sight, filled with emotions Loki cannot name. When she speaks, she doesn’t look Loki’s way. “My husband slips further and further into Valhalla. This sleep is different, it has never lasted so long.”

Loki doesn’t know what to say, so he says nothing. If she thinks he’s going to muster sympathy for the Allfather, she’s sorely mistaken.

“Yet, I don’t expect you, of all people, to care,” Frigga says softly.

Ah, so she isn’t a fool. Still bold to bring Loki so close to Odin’s sleeping form. He still can’t dare himself to look too long, so he only looks to her from a safe distance.

“Forgive me if I don’t,” he tells her. “But *why* have you brought me here?”

Frigga turns to him now, fully. He can’t imagine how anyone could question her authority, regal and elegant. How different would things have turned out if she had been the voice of Asgard all those years ago? Even before the First War.

“I trust you, Loki Laufeyson.”

He can’t help but soften at her words. She may be the only one in Asgard that does. He’s not even sure he can speak for Thor.

“I’m honored.” It’s the truth.

“The Council wanted to wait until Odin fully passed from this world to the next before beginning Thor’s coronation. Perhaps they still held onto the hope that he would wake, and my son would once again be only a Prince.”

Loki’s gaze briefly flirts to the bed. He could ensure that *didn’t* happen, even with the shackles surpressing his seidr. “Why would an early coronation be of any concern to the Council?”

“There are those that share the views of the Allfather. Dated and misaligned views that they are,” Frigga says. She walks to stand in front of him, hand reaching out to stroke at his cheek with the back of her knuckles. Loki closes his eyes and leans into it— maternal and affectionate in a way that he’s never known.

“I take it that Thor’s views diverge?”

“As do mine. But all minds can be changed, with persuasion.”

She pulls her hand back, and Loki could cry at the absence of warmth.

“The coronation,” Loki breathes out.

“It took a great deal of convincing. But, by tomorrow, Thor will be king.”

He takes a deep breath and casts one last withering look at Odin’s sleeping form. He looks ancient and weak. His brittle gray hair fanned around him and his fingers gnarled with age where they rest on his chest. He may as well be dead. It’s hard to believe this is the man that destroyed everything Loki has ever loved.

“I hope Thor will be a better man than his father,” Loki says bitterly. Still, he knows in his heart

that it's true. Thor will be, he already is.

“I believe in my son’s perseverance for peace between our realms. You’ll find this time around he has a much clearer head on his shoulders.”

Loki remembers Thor’s promise, standing with his hand on Loki’s cheek, a promise that he will make things right. And another promise made beneath a canvas of the cosmos— Loki rubs at his wrists where the iron bites him.

“Do you love him?” Loki finds himself asking Frigga. She needs no clarification on what he means, because she looks over her shoulder and her face tightens up.

“He is my husband.”

It answers enough.

Loki doesn’t see Thor again, not until he’s being escorted to the throne room and made to stand at the bottom of the steps. The coordination of the ceremony is sloppy at best with last-minute preparations, but it’s been made clear by Frigga that time is of the essence.

Thor must be officially named King of Asgard.

He’d been dolled up and fussed over all morning, yet another new outfit tailored for him. This one green and gold and fit for a prince. The fur gifted from Thor had also been carefully pinned into place and groomed and brushed as if it were part of Loki himself. Dagny had presented him with a golden circlet that nestled perfectly on his forehead, dipping between his horns.

Loki thinks he looks handsome, and absently, he hopes Thor thinks so too.

Asgard cheers when Thor enters the hall, making his way to the foot of the steps. He’s dressed in his nicest ceremonial armor, the hammer, Mjolnir, in his hand. He raises her in the air and causes another uproar. Loki can’t help but watch with an amused little twitch of his lips.

That foolish boy is still in there, and Loki finds himself relieved.

Frigga stands in front of the throne, watching Thor with a mother’s love. The process is lost in a blur, because Loki can only focus on the way Thor kneels on one knee, watching with rapt attention as the weight of Asgard falls on his shoulders.

When it’s done, the people cheer again, and Loki joins.

Thor turns to him catches Loki’s eye with his own, and winks.

He’s so caught off-guard that he misses the way Frigga smiles, knowing and private.

It's hot, even though the sun has long since set. Loki tugs at his shirt, willing it to unstick from his clammy skin. He wouldn't be out here if it weren't for the attendant who found him during the whirlwind of an afterparty with a request to meet Thor in the gardens.

The night is quiet, save for the chirping of an insect and muffled vibrations of the roaring feast far indoors. He's almost given up— Thor is probably being pulled in a hundred different directions— when he hears the crunch of leaves beneath a boot.

“Thor—”

Loki's heart stops. Thor isn't who he finds before him. A face, old and pinched in perpetual dissatisfaction. An elder on the Council, the name escapes him, but he remembers that face. And that stare, full of disdain and hatred.

Lord Erikson.

“Your Majesty is preoccupied,” he snarls.

“Well, then I should just be going,” Loki replies airily, and with a confidence that he doesn't have. He turns to come face first with a big brute, possibly bigger in width than Thor.

Oh, he realizes. This is an ambush.

“You won't be going anywhere,” Erikson says. He's closer now, Loki can feel that hot breath on his back. He's fairly confident he could take them, or at least wear them down enough to make a quick escape. This would be easier with his seidr— they'd both be knocked flat on their back by now. But, from the tree line, four more shadows emerge, each bigger than the next.

Damn.

A hand flies up to hold a cloth against his mouth, and Loki kicks out with every ounce of strength he has. He screams, but it's muffled and a fist to his gut punches out all the air left in his lungs.

So. They're going to kill him.

“You've bewitched the crown of Asgard,” Erikson says, and another blow sends him to his knees. The cloth drops from his mouth, but Loki's too busy coughing to try and call for help.

In a panic, Loki finds the strings of the bond inside him. Everything he feels, fear and pain, he pushes through.

“What good does this do if I've already ensnared him?” Loki spits. There's no point in trying to convince them differently. He holds his aching stomach and attempts to get a good look at Erikson's face. He pushes that through the bond as well. At least he can seal his attacker's fate.

“Cut the head off the snake.”

And then something hard comes down on *his* head, and Loki chokes out a scream. The pain is white-hot and cracks through his nerves like lightning. He doesn't see the next blow coming, but the force is at least enough to fade the world dark.

As his consciousness slips away, there's a voice. His bloodied lips twitch in what could be a smile,

because it sounds a lot like Thor.

Loki stumbles into the dark.

act v.i

Chapter Summary

act five: healing

Consciousness fades in and out, the world swimming and his vision so blurred that he can't make out anything, save the darkness and silhouettes moving against it. The air is buzzing with something; static and electricity. The crisp smell of a storm, and of ozone, and of power.

Thor, Loki thinks hazily.

He tries to pry his eyes open again, but his heavy lids refuse to cooperate. Beneath his fingers, the earth feels scorched. Strange, but he's in no state of mind to dwell on it now. There's a throbbing on the left side of his head that won't subside. Loki licks his lips and tastes blood.

"Loki?"

There are hands on his face now, cradling it as gentle as such quaking things can. With each jostling turn, Loki lets out a low groan. The pain is so intense, it almost doesn't register as pain at all.

"I'm sorry," Thor says softly, and he attempts to pillow Loki's bleeding head onto his lap. His firm thighs make for a terrible pillow, and Loki opens his mouth to tell him so, but nothing comes out. "You're going to be okay now."

Loki very much doubts that; he feels like he already has one foot stepping over to Hel.

Then, he's being hoisted up by strong arms. His eyes blink open for a split second, and his poor vision allows him to barely make out shapes of bulky men strewn about the ground. When he rolls his head back up, Thor is looking at him— and, perhaps it's the head injury, but his eyes seem to glow an impossible blue.

"Did you kill them?"

Thor holds him a little tighter, and Loki can see his lips press into a thin line. "No, but they will answer for their actions."

Loki feels a laugh bubble out of him, gurgled with the metallic taste of blood. Of course, Thor didn't kill them. He is a good man, a good king.

He doesn't realize he's spoken this out loud until he feels Thor's chest seize beneath his cheek. Loki chances a glance back up, his eyesight slowly returning to him, as well as his delirious mind. He's being stared at in quiet disbelief.

"How can you say that?" Thor asks, not unkindly. He carries Loki like a bride through a threshold, and not a prisoner through a garden.

It's absurd, so Loki laughs again.

“It’s not funny,” he chastises and truly doesn’t sound the least bit amused. “Look what I let happen to you.”

“You didn’t *let* anything happen to me,” Loki murmurs into the warmth of Thor’s chest. He feels the tremor of a chuckle and lets himself smile.

“Stubborn.”

Whether it’s his state of delirium, his injuries, or something else entirely, Loki is overcome with an urge to reach up and place his hand on Thor’s bearded cheek. Unlike so many urges before it, he gives in. Thor sucks in a breath, but Loki watches as he closes his eyes and turns toward his palm.

“Thank you,” Loki whispers.

And the world fades once again.

Loki wakes a second time to the healer he recognizes as Eir standing over him, fiddling away at the soul forge. He groans at the dull ache still present, but ultimately, he feels better.

“You’re awake,” she observes, and Loki bites back the snappy response dancing on the tip of his tongue. “Good. I was worried you wouldn’t.”

Somehow, he doubts that. It would probably make things a lot simpler if his attackers had succeeded. He tries to push himself up, wincing when pain shoots from his side. Eir puts a hand to his chest and guides him back down, clucking her tongue disapprovingly.

“I didn’t know you cared.”

“I don’t,” she deadpans. It’s strange that her comment only strengthens his positive opinion of her. She gives him a wry smile and jerks her head over her shoulder. “He, however, does.”

Loki cranes his neck the best he can to find Thor slumped in a borrowed chair, head tilted uncomfortably onto his shoulder, sleeping. Loki’s heart swells in his chest at the sight, a wave of affection rolling over him so mighty, that he checks to make sure Eir didn’t notice a strange palpitation on the forge.

“How long has he been there?”

“Since he brought you to me,” Eir replies, doing a poor job of repressing her smile. “The Queen did make him bathe and change his attire, seeing that he was very heavily covered in blood.”

Loki remembers the bodies on the ground, the stench of burnt earth and the tang of blood. He swallows and finally looks down at his own body, blue skin peppered with purple bruises the spaces that weren’t covered with bandages.

Then he remembers his head and the blinding pain that accompanied it. When he reaches to touch at his horn, Eir places a gentle hand on his wrist, stopping him in his movement.

“I’m sorry,” she says, and she really does sound it.

“For what?”

Eir opens her mouth, but the voice that comes out isn’t hers.

“Loki?”

Thor stands, groggy, but wide-eyed. Loki is suddenly struck with the memory of electric blue.

And, then another, of Thor holding him to his chest.

And, Loki reaching to touch and how miraculously lighter his wrist felt.

He looks down at his hands, and his wrists, and finds nothing but his own skin. No iron, no shackles. He very well may pass out again, but he forces his eyes to lift to find Thor now kneeling at his bedside. Loki blinks like he’s dim, while Thor watches him with adorned wonder.

Eir coughs, and both Thor and Loki tear their eyes away from one another. In the next moment, she dissipates the soul forge and collects her notes, giving a terse nod to Thor.

“I’ll leave you two, but I’ll be back to check the stitching,” she says, raising her eyebrows and looking between them.

Loki feels his cheeks warm at the obvious subtext of her words and finds it very hard for his eyes to land on anything that isn’t Thor. Finally, she grants a small mercy and leaves with a soft click of the door.

Though, what measure of mercy is it truly? Now they’re alone.

He looks back down at his unbound wrists, encompassed with an emotion he can’t begin to understand. It surpasses gratitude and dwarfs sentiment.

“You took them off.”

“You were dying,” Thor tells him. “I knew your seidr would work to repair your wounds while I brought you here.”

Loki scoffs, if only to hide the smile threatening to break. Thor wasn’t going to let him die.

But— he couldn’t, could he?

It’s jarring how quickly his pleasant mood turns sour. If Thor had let him die, he would be sealing his own fate. In saving Loki, he only saved himself. His fingers curl into tight fists where they rest on his lap, and at once, Thor reaches to place his hands over them.

The touch calms him instantly, and Loki turns his head toward him, sending a silent prayer that he doesn’t look as desperate as he feels.

“Loki,” Thor whispers as if he knows exactly where Loki’s train of thought has turned. “I could never let anything happen to you.”

“That’s just it,” Loki hisses. He tries to sound spiteful, and not distraught. “You can’t.”

“I would have saved you. With or without the curse.”

Loki's heart aches, so he responds the only way he knows how. The only way he can process what he hears, and that's with venom. Surely, deep down, he knows the truth and knows that Thor speaks it. But, the part of him that he sometimes hates rears its ugly head.

"Is that what I am to you? A curse?"

Thor's fingers tighten their grip on Loki's hands, and Loki tells himself he doesn't pull away because he's simply too exhausted. No matter his sharp words, Thor's touch stays gentle.

"Sometimes," he tells Loki, fondly. His handsome face cracks into a smile—and Loki hates him. He hates him because he *can't* hate him.

He smiles back. "And you are mine."

It's the truth. What a cursed existence they both live.

The air between them feels suffocating and still, and suddenly Loki is aware of how close they really are. Light filters through the grand, arching windows and bathes Thor in the gold of Asgard. He appears kinglier than Loki has ever seen him. It's breathtaking, and the air is quite literally stolen from his chest.

Loki lurches forward. No, that's just the pain returning.

"Are you okay?"

Dumb question, but Loki feels no need to point it out.

That piercing sensation returns to his head, sharp and needle-like. Instinctively, he raises his hand to touch where the pain blossoms, expecting to find the curve of his horn and meeting only air.

Loki stops. He tries again, and his fingers find nothing.

"I'm sorry," Thor is saying, and Loki only barely registers it.

His horn is gone.

In a flurry of panic, he reaches over the other side, and his heart resumes its beating to find it still intact. He turns to Thor, and his face must say it all, because Thor shakes his head. Loki has never seen him so sympathetic.

"Eir," he starts. Thor seems to choose his words carefully, licking his lips in concentration before continuing. "She isn't familiar with Jotun anatomy. She did her best to reattach it, but..."

There is no need for him to finish his sentence. She couldn't do it.

To be honest, he's not sure it would even be possible. It wasn't uncommon for horns to become damaged, but to be done so on the battlefield was seen as an act of honor. Warriors wore their broken horns like a medal to show all of Jotunheim what they've sacrificed.

Loki's stomach turns. What did he have to show? He was ambushed, and unable to access his greatest strength. Where was the honor in that?

"I'm not a damsel in distress," Loki says. Thor startles, but only soothes the back of Loki's hands with his thumbs. The context for his particular train of thought is no doubt lost on Thor, but he doesn't make a comment on it. "I was reputable on the battlefield."

“I remember,” Thor chuckles. “I have no doubt you still are.”

Loki closes his eyes and leans his head against the soft, feather pillow. He hopes that is true. At the moment, every inch of him aches. Body and soul. There’s not a part of him that feels formidable. He reaches in with his seidr, finally restored to him, and works to consciously reduce the pain.

He’ll need to rest if he’s to heal properly. His seidr, in tune to his needs and desires, begins to knead him back into sleep.

“Rest.”

“I already am,” Loki retorts, and he doesn’t have to open his eyes to know Thor is smiling.

“I’ll be here when you wake,” he promises, and Loki is only vaguely awake enough to feel the brush of lips on his cheek.

The last thing that transmits to his senses before he falls back into sleep is the overwhelming feeling of love being pushed through their shared, cursed bond.

act v.ii

The room they move him to is not his own.

Well, it is, in a sense, it *used* to be. The layout is overwhelmingly nostalgic, as if nothing has changed at all. Which can't be further from the truth. Everything has changed, and then some.

His seidr has mended what Eir and the other healers couldn't, but he still walks slowly as he trails fingers over the familiar wood of the bedposts. The bedding is different, but the furniture is all the same. However, when he looks into the full-length mirror, he doesn't find the same Loki. Still bruised like a moldy fruit, hair on the side of frizzed, and white bandage wrapping the missing horn.

Everything.

Loki sighs, sits at the corner of his bed and presses the heels of his palms to his eyes so hard that he sees stars. Despite new revelations coming to light, he feels weary and bogged down. Lord Erikson and his goons acted merely as a cruel reminder to the truth.

He will never be welcomed in Asgard, regardless of Thor's favor.

Terrible homesickness strikes him, and he leans back on the bed and holds his hands above at eye-level. Blue. And even if he took the advice his Elders gave him so many years ago, they will always be blue.

Loki changes his skin for no one, and for no realm.

"Perhaps he simply wanted to be Loki, Prince of Jotunheim."

Loki curls in on himself and lets out a long, overdue sob. He misses his home, and his brother, and the ice and the cold. He misses his horn and his own collection of furs. He misses sparring with the warriors and practicing seidr with the elders. He misses feeling useful, and powerful, and free.

He touches his wrist, the manacles are still gone. There had been a part of him that assumed they'd be replaced. He could break the bond and flee, he could leave.

He could go home.

The thought sends his chest fluttering, and he blinks at the domed ceiling of his chambers.

Was there anything to go back to? Jotunheim had been on its last leg, and resources dwindle fast in warfare. What was of his people? Starved and dying, withering away in darkness while he slept on soft sheets and dallied around Asgard's garden?

No, Loki thinks resolutely. He's a survivor.

And this is because he is Jotun, and the Jotnar are strong.

Thor promised he would fix things, and for once, Loki is inclined to trust him. Acting irrationally is what got them into this mess in the first place. Jotunheim will survive in his patience.

Loki will stay.

Thor had asked him if he could be happy here, and he had answered a truthful yes.

He'll make that so— for now.

“You look good.”

Thor's voice is warm and sincere, and something in Loki's chest coils tight and hums. He turns to find Thor standing in the doorway, propped against it like the picture of casual. It's been nearly two weeks since Loki has last seen him.

But he should have known he would see him today; the day after his attackers sentencing. Four sentences to the dungeons for the muscle-men, and treason for the councilman, Lord Erikson, and his conspiracy against the King's thrall.

Loki had absolutely bristled at that, but it was satisfying to see the look of horror on Erikson's heinous face when the Bifrost exiled him.

“I look *better*,” Loki corrects, and finishes plaiting his hair. He tosses the braid back, where it now brushes between his shoulder blades, and meets Thor half-way to the middle of his room.

“You look *good*,” Thor reiterates. It's not a flirtation, more like compliment one would give an friend. Loki doesn't let that bother him too bad, even if he *is* shirtless and Thor hasn't even attempted to stare lewdly.

But he does, however, reach a hand around to faintly touch at Loki's back. Those battle-rough fingers pet at his bare skin, and it's all Loki can do to suppress a full-body shiver. He steps closer into Thor's space so that he might steady himself on his broad chest if needed.

Maybe this meeting is going fine after all.

“Did they do this to you?”

Loki isn't sure what he's referring to exactly until it registers that Thor is caressing the jagged scar on his back.

“No, your Destroyer left that when,” Loki stops mid-sentence, and lifts his eyes up to Thor and finds him understanding. “You know.”

“Yeah,” Thor coughs awkwardly.

An uncomfortable tension fills the space between them. Loki isn't sure what to say.

Sorry that I infiltrated your realm with lies and charm, nearly fucked you in this very room, and then stole the Casket while inciting a war?

Though, if he did, Thor's response may be:

It's fine! I lied to you about being king, and then fought you in said war, and brought you back as a prisoner because you placed a bond of fate on us both.

Loki laughs, not to himself, but out loud.

“What?” Thor asks him, smiling for the laughter must be contagious. His eyes sparkle in the filtering afternoon sun. Radiant, and grand, and—

Loki stops himself from droning anymore absurd poetries.

“It’s ridiculous, is it not?”

Thor hums, clearly amused. The hand that once traced the scar is now resting on Loki’s lower back. He’s only just now aware that they are still just a breath apart, and Loki raises his hands to rest them on Thor’s chest, firm and warm beneath his palm.

“What is?” Thor’s question comes out as nearly a whisper.

“This. All of this.”

Loki tracks all his movements, the way his eyes make quick flight along his face, the way his breathing seems to slow, despite his heartbeat quickening. Absently, he remembers that his manacles are off and that Thor has made a promise.

He opens his mouth to tell him exactly that, but Thor steps back making a small, triumphant noise.

“I almost forgot why I came.”

“Oh?”

Unless that reason is to kiss him senseless, Loki can’t imagine he cares. But he attempts not to let himself visibly deflate, and squares his shoulders. Thor digs into a satchel tied at his waist, and Loki does find himself just a little curious.

“Here,” Thor says, and carefully pulls out a lump wrapped in white cloth and holds it out with a shy smile. Loki takes it with just the slightest bit of trepidation.

When he opens the cloth, his heart stops. A golden cast of a horn.

“I had it molded from the one you lost, I hope you don’t mind.”

Loki can’t tell if it’s the way the gold shines, or if it’s the tears welling that makes it glint in his hands. He’d grown accustomed to his appearance with the broken nub present on his forehead. He’d made peace with the phantom pains. But— the gift is so very thoughtful, that Loki finds himself handing it back to Thor, whose expression shifts very close to devastation.

“Loki—”

“Will you?” And Loki bows to present his head.

He hears Thor audibly swallow and fits the artificial horn to the broken base. The skin there is only a little tender, but it’s a perfect fit, and there is a feeling of wholeness to him when Loki stands back straight.

“Thank you,” Loki tells him, and Thor just stares wide-eyed and nods. “And how do I look?”

“Beautiful.”

Enough.

Loki takes Thor's face in his hands and brings it to meet his own.

The first press of lips has Loki's body melting against him. In an instant, Thor is kissing back, mirroring Loki by holding his face and walking them backward until a thud against the wall stops their progression.

Loki opens for him, lets Thor lick and kiss into his mouth until his head spins. He can't help the needy pants that escape every time Thor breaks away to catch a breath. His body is now pressed between a wall and Thor's solid form, and he can't think of any place he'd rather be.

None at all.

"Please," Loki whines, and he's not sure what he's even begging for. For Thor to kiss him, or hold him, or fuck him? Everything, or more?

Thor pulls back and rests his head on Loki's shoulder, breathing heavy, but keeping him pinned to the wall. Loki's stomach is doing somersaults, and he'd already close to hard and if the trembling in his thighs is anything to caution, wet.

"What's wrong?" Loki asks, afraid for a moment that Thor's had second thoughts. Or worse, he never wanted to be kissed at all.

Thor chuckles into the crook of his neck, and Loki feels every rumbling quake against his body. "I'm trying to find my will to stop."

"Who told you to stop?"

Thor lifts his head, blue eyes blown with lust. He grins, showing perfectly aligned teeth. Teeth that Loki would very much like to bite him in some of his more sensitive places. His thigh, for example, which he raises against Thor's leg to pull him closer.

Loki gives him what he hopes is a flirty, yet challenging, glare.

"You're king, do as you please."

Thor dives in again, and Loki practically moans into his mouth. Two hands come to grab his shoulders and spin him around, off the wall and toward his bed.

Finally, it's happening, the mighty Thor will prove his vigor and bravado and—

Thor freezes, eyes wide and staring at something past Loki's head.

It takes everything in his power not to out-right groan. Loki casts an unimpressed look over his shoulder to find a palace attendant red-faced with his mouth working open and closed like a fish gasping for air.

"My King," the boy stammers, and Loki nearly feels sorry.

Thor releases him, and Loki adjusts where his cloak came askew with a dignified huff. It's hard not to notice the shift in Thor's mood, melancholy and sad. He tries not to worry himself over it. After all, Thor *is* officially king, no matter what news this boy brings—

"I have one last gift for you," Thor says softly, quiet enough for only Loki to hear.

Last. A pit opens up in his gut.

“King Helblindi has arrived from Jotunheim,” the attendant announces.

Loki can only hear the beating of his heart in his ears. His muscles seize, and his knees buckle, but Thor is behind him as a reassuring warmth, holding him steady.

His brother. His brother is alive. His brother is here, in Asgard.

Oh, no. *His brother is here in Asgard.*

“What?” His voice comes out a poor parody of his normal self.

“You’re going home,” Thor tells him, but it sounds bittersweet.

act v.iii

“Before you say anything,” Thor is saying slowly, but it sounds disoriented, muffled, and distant to his ears.

Loki feels hands on his shoulders, grounding him so that he doesn’t fall out to the floor boneless. He can’t speak to argue. His brain can barely even process what’s been said to him. Thor pulls him close, back to chest, leaning to his ear and whispering soothing calms.

“It’s not a secret,” he continues. “It’s a surprise. I had to make sure.”

Loki knows what that means. He had to make sure there was a brother to write to, and a brother to respond. And there was.

There *is*.

His brother is alive.

“He’s here?” Loki asks, voice cracked. A rhetorical question, really, but he needs to hear it again. Just to make sure.

“King Helblindi is waiting in the throne room,” the attendant replies. “He’s eager to see you.”

Loki knows what that means too. Helblindi wants to know if Loki is whole, or in pieces, tattered or torn. And, he is tattered and torn, but not in the physical sense. He thinks to the golden horn on his head.

Well, maybe he *is* in pieces. But he doubts Hel made it from the war unscathed.

“And I’m leaving?” Loki suddenly asks, panicked.

That’s what he wanted. Right?

Thor nods to the servant, a silent dismissal, leaving them alone. He spins Loki around to face him, hands still planted firm on his shoulders to keep him upright.

“You want to go home, don’t you?” The way Thor asks makes it sound like there’s a part of him that hopes differently. “You are welcome to stay here. If that’s what you want.”

Loki’s heart breaks in two.

“I want to go home,” he tells Thor, closes his eyes to stop the tears and to stop himself from having to see the hurt on Thor’s face. He feels like a child. “I want to go home.”

Thor pulls him back in, cradling his head to his chest where it rises slowly up and down, up and down. Loki only realizes he’s crying when the linen beneath his cheek dampens, and he attempts to sniff back all evidence. He’s never felt so torn in half. He loves his family, his realm, Jotunheim.

But he loves Thor too.

Loki blinks open his eyes, tears drying in an instant.

Oh.

“I know,” Thor whispers, sounding very much like a someone in pain trying to be strong. “I could feel it. I don’t think you *meant* for me to feel it, but I could.”

“What?”

“Your homesickness.”

Loki swallows. Right.

Thor allows him the decency to clean himself back up. He wipes the tears from his eyes, lucky that the natural red won’t give him away. Loki’s escorted down the halls by Thor himself, side-by-side and arm-in-arm. Neither of them speaks, the heavy silence makes sure of that.

What is there to say?

Loki is leaving. No grand declaration of love will change that. His people need him to be a better prince than he was. Asgard and Jotunheim can live in peace, and he must show them.

“Are you ready?” Thor asks him.

They’re stopped in front of the throne room doors now. Just beyond these walls is his brother, waiting for him. He hasn’t seen him in years, the war has a funny way of breaking a family apart. Panic floods his chest. What if Helblindi has no intention of returning peacefully? What if he takes Loki and slaughters the court of Asgard?

How deep does his vengeance go?

No, Hel was always smarter than Laufey. And if he thinks he can end this with *more* blood— he will listen to Loki.

Thor gives him a light squeeze on his arm and, despite everything, smiles. And Loki’s heart breaks for the umpteenth time, but he squares his shoulders and juts out his chin.

“I am.”

The doors open, and Loki finds that he very much *is not*.

His brother makes the throne room look like a linen closet. Massive, and muscled, hardened with the sights of war and scarred with the reality of it. Dressed in fur and leather, the signet of Laufey pinned to his chest. A true picture of Jotnar beauty. But all that stoicism vanishes the moment his blood red eyes find Loki, dumbstruck in the doorway.

“Loki,” he breathes out, soft and rumbling. Helblindi drops to one knee and spreads his arms out.

Suddenly Loki is four-hundred years old again, running through Jotunheim’s palace halls. He can almost feel the ice on his skin, the way the cold wind would kiss his face. He throws himself into his brother’s massive arms and buries his head into the furs at his neck.

“You’re alive.”

Helblindi gives a rumbling laugh, large hands coming to stroke down Loki’s hair and back. Making sure he’s intact, that he’s not hurt or scarred. “So are you. I thought we had lost you in that final battle. We looked everywhere, but never found a body.”

“I’m here,” Loki whispers. “I’m alive.”

“As a prisoner.”

“As a guest,” Thor speaks up.

Loki finds him seated on the throne, Gungnir loose in hand. He gives Thor a look that he sincerely hopes convinces him to shut up.

“Well,” Thor continues, and Loki sighs. “A prisoner at first, but a guest now.”

Loki feels Hel tense beside him, and he reaches out to rest a reassuring hand, smiling up at him to let him know it’s okay. Sometimes Thor is just a babbling idiot, and that he means no harm. Then he drops that smile and stares a dagger through Thor, shaking his head subtly.

Frigga, who has been ever patient and watching next to Thor, claps her hands together and smiles up at Helblindi. If anyone can charm his brother, perhaps she can.

“Asgard welcomes you, King Helblindi.”

Helblindi gives a gruff grunt in response; which Loki supposes is progress.

“I’m here to bring my brother home, that is all. I have no interest in anything else pertaining to Asgard.”

He’s already placing a hand at Loki’s back and unceremoniously ushering him along like he’s still but a tiny frostling. Panic beats at his chest like a drum, but Hel’s brute strength keeps him moving toward the door. Loki struggles against his brother, clawing his way to twist around and get one last look at Thor.

Wait. No, he has to properly say goodbye.

“Wait!”

Hel stills and as a result, so does Loki. They both turn to see Thor standing, eyes wide and hand outstretched. He curls his fingers and drops his fist loosely to his side. Frigga stands by, watching, seemingly calm, but Loki can see her nerves shining through even from his vantage point.

Helblindi raises one of his thick eyebrows—the only trace of hair on his head—and waits, if only to amuse Thor. True to his bravado, Thor doesn’t budge; he bangs the hilt of Gungnir against the marble floor.

They all wait in silence, Loki’s eyes darting around the room until they land on back Thor, who stares at him with an unreadable expression. It’s like he’s trying to tell Loki something, but Loki has no clue what. They have a bond, but not a direct psychic connection. What, Thor! What!

A smaller set of double doors off to the side open and a hoard of Einherjar march through in perfect unison. For a split second, Loki doubts everything he knew to be true of Thor—but then he sees the black and blue box being carried.

He hears the Casket's song.

Thor descends the staircase, leading the Einherjar and the Casket to where both Loki and Helblindi stand frozen, transfixed by the missing piece of Jotunheim.

"This belongs to you," Thor says. He takes the Casket with both hands, pale knuckles looking out of place next to her icy glory and offers it to Helblindi. "I know I'll never wash Asgard clean of our transgressions. But I wish to try and make things right. Start by rebuilding your home, and perhaps in the future, we may call Jotunheim our ally."

With great, shaking hands, his brother takes the Casket and immediately passes it to him. Loki understands at once what he must do, and with a wave of his hand and call of his seidr, it vanishes into an interdimensional pocket. Though she is out of sight, Loki knows they both feel the Casket's power, already working to make Jotunheim whole.

"Thank you, King Thor," Helblindi says. It's sincere, if not a bit skeptical. But Loki knows he understands this is no small feat. Thor has risked a lot by returning the Casket to their hands. Asgard is still tainted with the brainwashed propaganda of their home.

"Thor," Loki whispers, forgoing a title, the familiar name rolling off his tongue. He makes sure Thor can feel his gratitude, his happiness, and his sorrow.

"Come, Loki."

This time, there is no urgent shoving of him out the door.

The lie comes easily. "I have some things I need to get, I'll meet you at the Bifrost."

"I'll escort you," Thor pipes up, a little too quickly.

Helblindi narrows his eyes, still untrusting. But Loki lays a gentle hand on him, smiling. "It's okay."

And, because she is sent from Valhalla, Frigga sweeps in to replace Loki's touch on Helblindi's arm with her own. She urges him forward, a toothy and pleasant smile beaming up at him. "And allow me to escort you. You must tell me of Jotunheim."

His brother is startled but walks with her all the same. After a careful distance, Frigga glances of her shoulder to give them both a private smile.

"Well," Loki says awkwardly when they're alone. Not completely alone, the silent and frankly, unsettling Einherjar still stand to stare. "Shall we?"

Loki loops his arm with Thor, carrying them out of the throne room and into the hall. The palace is quieter than he expects, what with the Jotnar king coming to retrieve the prisoner of war. He wonders how far in advance this plan has been concocted. Loki imagines it ruffled quite a few feathers, probably enough to have someone act out.

"Is this what upset Lord Erikson so bad?" Loki asks conversationally, ignoring the phantom pain of his horn at the memory.

"I'm sorry," Thor answers. Indirect, but an answer enough. "They thought you had bewitched me."

"Did they forget I was cut off from my seidr?"

“Maybe they weren’t all wrong. Maybe you had,” Thor hums, and Loki feels his cheeks flush and his stomach flip.

“Sentiment,” he scoffs, but fondly.

They’ve wandered far enough from prying eyes now, so Loki stops them. The overcast of clouds paints the typically golden landscape of Asgard in hushed blues. It’s a cruel, yet bittersweet, reminder of where he’s to be going. It’s a shame. He would like to see Asgard shine one last time.

“I can’t help but notice we aren’t near your chambers.”

“I have nothing to get,” Loki confesses. The only thing he sought to retrieve was whatever fleeting moments alone with Thor he could muster.

“Oh.”

More silence.

“I should break the bond,” Loki says like that was his plan all along. It’s true though, he has no use for it now. It’s the last thing reminding him of their horrible start.

He lifts his hands, begins to call forth his seidr, but Thor stops him.

“No, Loki.”

Loki blinks his eyes open.

“Keep it.”

“What? Why?”

“As a promise,” Thor says, and Loki can hardly believe his ears. He closes his eyes to try again and Thor grabs ahold of his wrists. They act as efficiently as the manacles did. “A promise that I won’t hurt you,” he explains.

“I know you won’t hurt me.”

“And,” Thor sighs. He’s embarrassed. “So that I can let you know when I’m missing you.”

To Loki, that sounds like it might hurt worst of all.

“Okay,” he agrees. Maybe it does sound a little nice, to know Thor is thinking of him. “Okay.”

Thor moves first, cupping the back of Loki’s neck and bringing their mouths together. It’s unhurried, a steady press of lips. Nothing urgent in either of them, content to taste and feel. Loki had thought he’d left his heart in Jotunheim, but he knows now that’s not the case.

His heart is here.

Loki pulls away, and Thor’s eyes are open, watching him with a soft sadness.

“I’m afraid all I have to give you is a kiss,” Loki says, though it pains him. “Anything more will hurt too bad.”

Thor nods in understanding. “You can always come back. Asgard will always welcome you.”

The golden horn on his head says different, but Loki dares not to sully the moment. So, instead, he smiles and places a chaste kiss to Thor's lips. In another world, perhaps this is where Thor asks for his hand again.

A second chance doesn't come, but he's expected that.

In another world, maybe Loki asks him. But that's impossible. Thor is King of Asgard and could never leave this behind for Loki's own war-torn home. But Loki can help rebuild and refortify and maybe...

He reaches into his tunic and grabs hold of the chain he finds there, tugging it off his neck and draping it onto Thor's.

"This is my most precious treasure," Loki tells him, quiet and serious. "I will come back for it."

Thor holds the little fire opal ring in his palm, looking down with huge, bewildered eyes. Then, he looks up with an understanding spread across his handsome features, lips curling into the first real smile Loki's seen him wear all night.

Thor and Loki arrive at the Bifrost hand-in-hand.

Helblindi looks anxiety-riddled and Frigga looks frazzled. Loki can't imagine how horrifically that conversation fizzled, no matter the Queen's charm and finesse.

"It's time to go," his brother says, and it sounds almost pleading.

Frigga and Loki trade places, Helblindi grounding him with a hand on his shoulder, as if he thinks Loki will bolt the second the portal opens. It's a smart move because as he watches Thor's pained expression, it begins to look like a viable option.

Loki nods to Frigga, and she nods back. He looks to Thor, mouths goodbye, and hopes the open connection of their bond tells him everything.

The Watcher places a sword in the pedestal, twists, and they are both pulled into a void of light.

Loki goes home.

act vi.i

Chapter Summary

act six: home

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Loki nearly falls at the first kiss of snow on his cheek. The bitter cold wraps around him, comforting in a way he hasn't felt in, what seems like, a lifetime. It wasn't so long ago, in the grand scheme of things. But, being homesick has a way of dragging out the days.

Jotunheim isn't any worse than he remembers. He doesn't think, at least. The sky is still dark, and the ice still cracked, the palace still crumbling. But as Loki walks side-by-side with the King, as the restored prince, he feels the Casket humming in hiding. He calls it forth with a wave of his hands, and it materializes in his grasp.

Power.

The Casket already begs to do work, a mournful song for the state of her home.

"We are back," Loki whispers to it, and Helblindi tilts his head down to marvel at the relic of their realm. "We are home."

Cheers erupt when they arrive at the heart of the city. Shocked gasps, loud yells of triumph. It feels as though they've won— and, perhaps they have. A long, winding brutal path to victory. The only thing they ever wanted, even more so than revenge.

A chance at hope.

Loki smiles to the Jotnar lining the entrance to the palace. He holds the Casket tight in his hands, wonders if they all feel it too. Children twice his size cling to the sides of their dams and sires, staring at such an integral part of their world, yet that they've never seen before.

"We will address them later," Helblindi says under his breath. "We must get this to the temple, and you need to rest."

Loki feels like resting is all he's done, but nods. He *is* rather exhausted, and it will be a dream to fall back into his own bed nest for once.

Once the palace doors are closed, and the muffled cheers of Jotunheim are silenced, does Loki allow his shoulders to slump. He passes the Casket to Helblindi, who's hand shakes when closing around it. Such a silly sight, to be made for giants, it looks small in their company.

“We kept your room up,” Loki’s being told as he traces his fingers along the icy wall. Not a drop of gold to be seen, except what’s on his person. That little piece of Asgard he’ll carry with him. “I always knew you’d return to us.”

Loki smiles despite the sinking feeling in his stomach. He should be happy, he should be ecstatic. They won.

There is nothing but guilt.

“Of course,” Loki says. “This is where I belong.”

Liar, a voice hisses in the back of his head. *Liar*.

Helblindi is right. His room is exactly as he left it. Towering ceilings, a bed of pelts to wrap himself in, shelves and desks topped with tomes and parchment and vials of potions that he *really* should have labeled more clearly. Loki examines a purple one, swirling the liquid and frowning. He has no clue what that is.

If Thor were here, he might make him drink it. Maybe it would turn him into a frog, or something equally hilarious.

Loki abruptly sits the potion vial down and turns away. No thoughts of Thor, not anymore. He’d said he would come back, but could he? What was there for him in Asgard?

A lot, his treacherous mind supplies.

Loki flings himself into his bed, sinking into the furs and staring up at the high ceilings. Fifteen feet, at best. A room that will always be too big for him, in a world that’s the same. He curls up on the bed, but it’s Thor’s pelt that he tucks under his chin, and it’s Thor’s pelt that he buries his nose in.

For the first time since he was a child, Loki watches the Morning Star rise above Jotunheim. The balcony in his quarters provides the perfect vantage point. Light slowly creeps over the dunes of snow and ice, reflecting in beautiful warm pinks and cool blues.

Already Jotunheim feels different.

“Laufey always knew you would be the one to restore our power.”

Helblindi comes to stand beside him, and Loki lets the tension in his shoulders drop. He hadn't even noticed the breath he'd been holding, watching the Casket breathe a long-forgotten life in the realm. There isn't bitterness in his words, but a hint of sadness.

"I took a bit of a detour," Loki says with a smile. Something unreadable passes over his brother's face at that, and he heaves a great sigh. The change in his mood is somewhat jarring, so Loki attempts to salvage it the only way he knows how. "I wouldn't be me if I didn't, would I?"

Helblindi does crack a smile at that, and Loki preens only a tiny amount.

"You always were difficult."

He pretends to be offended, but he knows it to be true. He's always had a penchant for mischief, but it has always been something his brother found fond. Taking up for Loki when he was caught, and even sometimes aiding in his pranks when he was just a frostling.

"You seem to like it just fine," Loki teases, all in good nature. It feels easy, nice. Like for a moment that they can forget the past couple hundred years.

"I'm not the only one," sighs Helblindi. "Am I?"

Loki tightens his grip on the railing. Swallows.

"What do you mean?"

"It seems the King of Asgard has taken an interest in you."

"We found companionship in each other's company," Loki says, slowly. It's a lie, and for once Loki would like not to do so. He wants to be open and honest with his brother; lies and secrets are what caused this mess to begin with. Loki knows that now, but still, he lies. "That is all."

Helblindi hums, red eyes on the horizon where the Morning Star lifts higher and higher. A reminder of what that companionship has wrought.

"Queen Frigga seems keen on bridging our realms."

Loki swallows again, a nervous sweat prickling at his hairline.

"Oh? Maybe it's something to look into."

His brother turns to him and lifts a brow, Loki does good to keep a straight face and his nerves in check. There's something unspoken simmering just on the surface of the air between them. And Loki has every mind to think it has something to do with whatever conversation transpired between them.

"You know," Helblindi starts, turning back away. Loki can suddenly breathe again without the weight of his gaze. "I always thought we would rule Jotunheim together, you at my side as my greatest advisor."

"Oh?" Loki asks, because it's the only noise his throat will produce. His stomach constricts tight, worry coiling around him.

Thought? Why would his brother no longer think him suitable for an advisor?

"Laufey always valued your clever mind, as did our brother. But perhaps you are more suited elsewhere."

Asgard, Loki knows. This is what he means.

He hates that he agrees. Is this not what he wanted? To return to Jotunheim, to return to his brother, and his people. To service his realm and bring her to glory? But— maybe uniting the Jotnar with Asgard is his duty?

Loki closes his mouth, realizing its been gaping open like a trap.

“My duty is here,” he says resolutely.

Helblindi places a hand on his back and draws him close, Loki follows just as he always has. He knows his brother won’t send him away, but he also knows that he will let him go. If he so chooses.

But the question remains. What does he want?

Days pass and Loki emerges himself into his work. He weaves complicated spells of seidr to fortify the walls of Jotunheim. He works alongside the common folk to rebuild ruins and to blossom crops suited to the temperature and terrain.

With the Casket’s presence, the spells hold, and slowly Jotunheim pieces itself back together.

They praise him as a savior, a title he admires, but is reluctant to claim.

It's in the new budding of a market that Loki first hears it, a tale of mistreatment at the hands of Asgard. How poor, poor Prince Loki was tortured and chained and escaped on sheer wit and power. How he stole the Casket back once again and left Asgard trembling in his wake.

He’d be lying if he were to say he isn’t just the tiniest bit flattered.

Though he doesn’t correct the tales of his own bravery, he *does* let them know that Asgard was nothing but pleasant. Careful, of course, to leave out the bits where he was, in fact, chained and imprisoned. That wouldn’t do well to smooth the relations between the realms.

What did that matter though? It’s been months now with no sign from Thor. Not even a tug at the bond.

Loki, wallowing in his stubbornness, refuses to act first.

How quickly Thor has forgotten him? Probably relishing in his new, mint kingdom. Searching the realms for a suitable bride to make queen.

Loki sniffs back his dissatisfaction and continues his walk of the royal garden’s construction.

If the layout is similar to Frigga’s courtyard, that’s for him to know.

The obvious conclusion is that Thor doesn’t miss him at all. He’s probably glad Loki is gone, finally rid of the blue Jotun seidr-weaver. His court, however displeased for giving up the Casket,

is probably just as relieved.

How could he ever think he belonged there?

Loki kneels down to brush at the leaves of a flowering bush, the foliage a deep blue and achingly familiar. It's the species circled in Thor's notes.

His heart thumps, but he keeps it to himself.

"Urd," Loki calls to his attendant that's been keeping a steady distance behind him. Urd catches up in three quick steps of his gigantic legs. "Send seeds of this to Asgard."

Urd blinks but nods, he won't dare to disobey his prince. "For King Thor, sir?"

Does *everyone* in this palace know about his misplaced affections?

"No," Loki bites out. "Address it to Queen Frigga."

She can add it to her collection. After all, it's a Jotun flower missing from her garden.

And maybe, *possibly*, Thor will see his package arrive and think to remember him.

Chapter End Notes

this chapter was difficult to get out. i hope it's not too boring. :')

act vi.ii

Loki finds himself where he often does, on his balcony overlooking Jotunheim. The Morning Star sets along the horizon, painting the sky blue and pink. He squints into the distance like he might find Asgard twinkling among the fading cosmos.

He doesn't.

His fingers go instinctively to his neck, where the fire opal necklace no longer hangs. Loki's fingers grasp at nothing and he feels lost. Homesick, once again, for a place that was never truly his home.

"It's okay to miss him."

Loki leans into Helblindi, comforted by his brother's warmth. He tries to ground himself in it. This is what he missed most of all, was it not? But now that he knows Hel is safe, and that Jotunheim is restored, that there is no more war to fight— where does that leave him?

"I don't," Loki replies petulantly. Helblindi's eyes are knowing, and they cut through the thinly-veiled lie. Loki sighs. "There isn't a place for me there."

"Queen Frigga seemed to think differently."

Loki is beginning to think they should have stayed away from each other.

"Do you two talk regularly?" It's meant as a joke, but Helblindi doesn't laugh. That makes him nervous, and if he's being honest, a bit angry. Hel gets correspondence from Asgard and Loki gets what? Nothing.

"Diplomatic issues only," Helblindi says, his scarred lip twitches in the corner.

Loki sees red. "What is this new-found love of Asgard?"

Helblindi hums, arms crossed against his broad chest. "I'm not one to forget our bloodied past, but even I can't be so blind to see the aid they've given us." He's looking out to Jotunheim, to the workers in the fields wielding seidr and tools to fortify their home.

"And Thor?" Loki asks quietly, but not without jealousy. "I suppose he sends you ravens as well?"

There is a full-bodied laugh from his brother, and a hand comes to land on the back of his neck. Loki shakes it off, bristles and steps away. His heart is breaking and all Helblindi can do is laugh? He was always a jealous one, perhaps this is exactly what he wanted to see. Loki turns to stomp back into his room, too irritated to be properly mad that he's being chased off his own balcony.

"You always were stubborn," Helblindi calls. "Perhaps you should reach out to him."

Loki groans in frustration and lets the balcony door slam.

The garden is quiet, but with improvements coming along in strides every day. Of course, the icy landscape doesn't provide a well enough foundation for the variety that Asgard's garden had, but the towering plants of crystalline leaves and blooms of blue and white were still breathtakingly beautiful in Loki's eyes. Idly, he hopes Frigga thought the same with the seeds he sent to her. Maybe she wrote to Helblindi about it.

Loki comes to a complete stop in the open circle of the garden center. There's no one around, Jotunheim takes a day of rest from the reconstruction— but, Loki, he hasn't rested in what seems like months.

It takes too much work to tamper the constant flutter in his heart.

"Okay," he calls out to no one. Well, not *no one*, but no one present. "You wanted me to keep the bond open."

Loki opens an eye and looks around. He's not sure what he's expecting. Thor to materialize in front of him? That would be nice. He feels his cheeks heat. That would be *very* nice.

Loki's hit with a realization that's been building in him since he returned; it's not some new revelation, but one that Loki's been trying hard to bog down.

He misses Thor, more than he's ever missed anyone else. Misses his stupid smile, and his bad—successful?— attempts at flirting. His hair, his eyes, his odd peach skin, and hornless forehead.

"I miss you," Loki yells into the empty space. "Did you hear that? I miss you."

He's greeted with nothing but silence, the mountain breeze rattling branches around him. Loki sniffs back his disappointment and slumps, burying his head in his hands. His fingers brush against the cool metal of his artificial horn, a phantom ache pulsing through him. Which is just one more phantom pain to add to a long list of phantom pains.

"And I love you," he says, quieter than the rest. "I love you."

Nothing, yet again. His heart beats against his chest, almost agonizingly.

Loki lowers his hands, blinks back the tears wetting his red eyes. He licks his lips, puffs up his chest, and decides. The runes are complicated, but he remembers them well. They're burned into his memory, more tedious than the already difficult spell to cast the curse. His fingers move accordingly, drawing lines in the frosty air, each trail of his fingertip leaving a trace of his green seidr.

Once the runes are laid out before him, shimmering faintly, he takes one more inhale, holding it, and waves his hand through. The spell disappears, the bond breaks and Loki immediately feels lighter.

It's done, it's over.

He feels better, but not great. That pain is still there, and he realizes at once why it hurt so bad before. It wasn't just his sorrow he felt.

It was also Thor's.

Loki drops to his knees, falling soft in the snow. He's read all the books in Jotunheim, studied with the Elders for years upon years, absorbed as much knowledge of the nine realms as feasibly possible— but he's still an absolute moron. And here he is, yet again, facing a monumental screw-up.

"I'm sorry," Loki says. This time there is truly no one to hear it.

Maybe it is for himself.

Loki finds his brother in the palace throne. He inspects the glittering walls of ice carved with the intricate detailing of their history. There is no one of his stature among the engravings.

"Restorations are coming along," Loki notes casually.

"Brother."

Helblindi stands from his seat, his massive white cloak draped over one side of his shoulder, his chest bared to the elements and heritage marks practically glowing on his dark blue skin. The breeches he wears are his fine leathers, and Loki only notices now the way his bald head is adorned with a gold circlet. Loki raises a brow.

"Special occasion?"

"None today." Helblindi's grin stretches across his face as he comes to meet Loki on the lower level. He's in an oddly chipper mood, one that Loki regards with great skepticism. "But for my little brother to seek me out, that *is* a special occasion."

Loki's cheeks go purple, but he presses forward, hands clasped behind his back with his head held high. "I'd like to take my place as your advisor."

Helblindi makes a surprised noise, watching carefully as Loki stalks around him like a vulture. "Just advisor?"

Loki stops, the heels of his boot clicking on the hard floor. "Yes," he says slowly, face burning. "Advisor."

"Relax," Helblindi says. His eyes are soft in a way Loki's never seen before; perhaps war doesn't always harden those in it. His brother is different, but that's not entirely bad. Loki is reminded of Býleistr, his kind words and gentle touches, as Helblindi brings a hand to the back of his neck. "I know your heart does not belong here."

"My heart will always belong to Jotunheim," Loki lies.

"Let me correct myself," Helblindi says with a sad smile. "I know your heart does not belong to me."

There's a tightening in his chest, and Loki lets out a slow breath, closing his eyes and nuzzling into his brother's touch. He wants to say that it's not true, but they would both see through his dishonesty. All he can do is press a kiss to the inside of Hel's wrist, hopes it's enough of an apology.

"So, tell me, why have you decided to stay?" His hand comes to tuck a stray hair behind Loki's ear, touch lingering at the rim of the golden horn. Loki shies away from him and ducks out of his reach.

"What place is there for me in Asgard?" Loki asks— he realizes, for a second time. He doesn't tell Helblindi the truth, that he's erased his last connection to the golden realm. That now, surely, Thor will forget about him.

And he must move on.

"If there is one thing I know about you, brother. It's that you always have a way of carving a place out for yourself."

Loki stares at Helblindi, that unreadable expression still present. "You're different," he says, finally, after a stretch of quiet regard.

"So are you." Hel retreats back to the throne, gait slow as he climbs the steps. He fits it perfectly—a king in every manner. Far wiser than Laufey ever thought about being. Jotunheim is lucky to have him, and though there will be a sting for years to come, Loki will be happy to stand by his side.

"I suppose," Loki hums, but he knows it to be true.

Loki wakes to a thunderous clap, jolting up in a cold sweat. The air is thick with a familiar scent, ozone and the beginnings of a storm. He pulls himself from the warmth of Helblindi's arms to slink his robe over his bare shoulders. His brother turns in his sleep, tugging the furs with him, and Loki slips from bed.

He arrives at the window just in time to see the light from the Bifrost dim into Jotunheim's night.

Before he can process what any of this means, there is a loud banging at the door. This, unfortunately, rouses Helblindi from his sleep, sitting up and feeling around the empty space where Loki was once sleeping.

"I think," Loki starts to whisper, but is cut off when the door flies open to reveal a panicked guard.

"Prince Loki," Urd acknowledges and then stumbles when he sees the King. Loki knows how this must look, but neither of them comments on it. Helblindi waves a hand for him to continue, formalities aren't important at the moment.

Urd swallows, nervous. "King Thor has just arrived in Jotunheim. He wishes to see the prince."

act vi.iii

Chapter Notes

this probably needs major editing, i just wanted to get it out. :) please let me know of any major mistakes!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Loki stands shell-shocked in the doorway, holding his robe close to him. How did Thor always have a habit of turning up while he's half-dressed? Truly a man of impeccable timing. Still, his heart flutters at the knowledge Thor is here.

Thor is in Jotunheim.

Oh, Loki thinks, remembering the bond he severed. He's probably angry.

"Tell him I'll be down momentarily," Loki says with a wide, pained smile. This isn't exactly how he planned their reunion, though it had involved a lot *less* clothing. "Let me dress."

Urd's deep-set, owlsh eyes widen impossibly large, edging comical. In truth, Loki may have laughed if his terror wasn't so unsettling.

So, Thor's rage must have caused quite the spectacle upon his arrival.

Loki takes a deep breath. It's fine, he only needs to explain.

"I'm afraid there's no time for that," Urd tells him, then he's stepping aside, making room for a broad silhouette of a figure.

"Thor—"

"You're alive." Thor's hands are warm when they grab ahold of his face. The action isn't hard, or fiery, and the look in his blue eyes show only worry. "I thought—" Those eyes search his face again; the relief wanes and his lips press into a flat line.

And Loki braces himself for what comes next.

"You're alive," Thor repeats, flatter.

Ah, there it is. The anger.

"Well, yes," Loki says casually. Thor's hands press tighter on his cheeks, pinching them together. He looks like a trout, so he shakes himself from Thor's grasp. "I don't know why you would think differently."

It's a lie and not a very good one.

"You were there," Thor stumbles, hand on his chest. "Then, suddenly you were gone!"

It's an *explanation* and not a very good one.

“I broke the bond,” Loki says. He steels himself, squaring his shoulders, preparing for a fight. Desperately, he wishes he had a good excuse but finds, like most things, his decision was based off incorrect assumptions. He leaves it at that, knowing it’s not enough.

Thankfully, he doesn’t have to explain, because something far worse happens. Helblindi coughs from over on the bed, and Thor’s eyes cut from Loki’s face to somewhere behind him. In the dark it’s hard to make out anything but the outline of Helblindi’s massive form as he leans up from the bed nest— his features lost to the shadows. From their position at the door, it could be any Jotun.

Loki doesn’t need the bond to feel the fury rolling off Thor in waves.

“It’s Helblindi,” he says quickly, placing both hands on Thor’s chest. The last thing they need is for the King of Jotunheim to be slain where he slept.

Thor’s anger subsides but shifts into confusion, gaze darting from Loki to Helblindi and back. It’s then that he realizes this probably doesn’t make it better. Loki heaves a great sigh; he grabs at Thor’s shirt to drag him further into the room. Luckily, Urd had found the common sense to scurry off. Which leaves only the three of them— and, well, three is most certainly a crowd.

“Do you mind?” Loki asks over his shoulder, not meaning to bite out the words but doing so anyway. “Please,” he adds, softer.

Hel does mind him, although with a great deal of irritation, obvious in his gait as he brushes past. This will be hard enough to explain without him acting like a scorned lover. Honestly, he’s is nearly half a millennium Loki’s elder— he shouldn’t act like such a child.

But the universe can’t make this easy on Loki, and Helblindi stops in front of Thor, towering a few feet over him and still puffing his chest to make himself seem bigger. Loki would roll his eyes at the dramatics of it all if he wasn’t actually worried about Hel losing his composure. Or Thor, for that matter. Neither were very predictable.

“Next time you march into Jotunheim unannounced, I will not be so merciful,” Helblindi says with a lowered voice meant to intimidate. It’s a bluff, Thor probably knows that too. He’ll never jeopardize war and the Casket now that they’ve come so far.

“I only came for Loki.”

“Did Loki call on you?” Hel asks with a raised brow and Thor flinches.

“That’s enough,” Loki snaps. He’s not some prize to claim— from either of them! “This pissing contest is unnecessary.”

Thor has the decency to look embarrassed, but Hel only smiles fondly, giving him a pat on the shoulder. It’s for show, to let Thor know how close they are, that Loki would allow him to touch so freely.

“I’ll be in my chambers if you need me,” Hel tells him sweetly, leaning down to plant a kiss between his horns. Loki feels his soul leave his body, and Thor looks just as pale as he openly gawks at the display.

If this keeps up, he’ll just take a nice extended vacation to Vanaheim and Thor and Helblindi can duke it out far away from him. His brother leaves before Loki is reduced to something so drastic. But, once the awkwardness settles between him and Thor, it begins to look like an option once more.

“I have a lot to explain,” Loki sighs.

“Probably more than I intended you to.”

He can’t help but wince, racking his brain for any way to answer *any* of the questions he knows Thor has. Best to start with the obvious.

“Your marriage proposal was not the first I’ve turned down,” Loki says quickly.

He refuses to meet Thor’s eyes, he knows the judgment that burns there. Asgard has never shared the same policies of royal marriages, the bond between siblings and the strength that came with it. But, as Helblindi so kindly put it, Loki has always been different.

“You mean—”

“Yes,” Loki bites back, cutting him off. “But before you ask, *no*. I only wished for the company tonight. He is my brother, my rightful King, and I do love him.” He chances a glance at Thor, who instantly looks relieved. Confusion, and a struggle to understand, but not a hint of that feared judgment.

“Of course, I didn’t mean—” Thor swallows, shifting on his feet. “There’s much you’ll have to teach me of your culture.”

Loki thinks back to the outdated, ratty book on Jotunheim. Thor had always wanted to learn. He smiles and nods his head. “I would love to,” he says truthfully.

“About the bond—”

Damn.

“Why did you break it?”

Thor steps closer, tone serious and concerned. Loki remains sure-footed, standing his ground though he would like to run. How to answer this? The truth is much too embarrassing— that he acted like a petulant child and broke it because he was too blind to recognize Thor’s longing for what it was.

Truth it is.

“I thought you had forgotten me.” His voice sounds small, even to him.

“You’re a fool,” Thor says, not unkindly. That sweet smile on his face, the one that makes his heart race.

Still, Loki isn’t the only one who made a foolish decision.

“I’m not the one that stormed into Jotunheim.”

The silence stretches between them. At his sides, Thor’s fingers twitch. Maybe he doesn’t understand the gravity of his actions, what unnecessary conflict that might have risen under different circumstances. The Aesir king bringing down the Bifrost, marching to the heart of the city with his famed hammer in hand.

Now Loki has a question.

“Why?” Loki dares him to answer— *needs* him to answer.

Loki isn't sure who moves first, just that Thor is on him in an instant and that warm mouth is on his, working him open with tongue and teeth and all the vigor worthy of a king.

It's all the answer he requires, a confession in every drag of Thor's hand down his body. Loki becomes all too aware of the insufferable amount of clothing between them and snakes a hand down to fumble with the laces of Thor's leathers— but not before grabbing a handful of his cock, heavy in his palm. An animalistic noise escapes him and Loki grins wicked against his mouth. And he momentarily ignores his job of stripping Thor from his clothes in favor of kneading him stiff and hard.

“Loki,” Thor growls, a warning. Though, what for, Loki isn't sure. They both want this, they've both wanted this— probably for longer than he cares to admit. Thor's hands stop their roaming to grip hard his shoulders, pulling back just enough so that Loki can see a question in his eyes.

Loki answers by working his fingers down the front of his breeches, gasping when they close around a hot, thick cock.

Loki smiles slow. Oh, he's been holding out.

Thor dives back in, tugging at Loki's hair to pull his head back just enough to mouth at his throat. Something rumbles against him, and it's only through the haze of his desire that he realizes Thor is speaking.

“What?” He barely it manages between his own needy noises, but Thor buries his head closer to his ear breathing hot, enough to make his already weak knees tremble.

“I heard you,” Thor growls, low.

“What?”

Thor finds the opening of his robe, pushing it off his shoulders and with Loki's free hand, the one currently not awkwardly attempting to stroke Thor's cock, he unties the belt and lets the garment drop to the ground. He's now painfully aware of his state compared to Thor; exposed and body craving, aching beyond belief.

“I heard you,” Thor repeats and Loki's lust-addled mind still struggles to understand the meaning. “You said you loved me, and then you were gone.”

Oh. Loki blinks his eyes open, going still against the constant moving of Thor. This is wildly more embarrassing than his hard cock against Thor's hip, or the fact he can already feel himself wet between his thighs.

Then, Thor stills too. “Is it true?”

Loki can't lie to him now, nor to himself.

“Yes,” he says on a shuddering breath. Thor's grip on his hair tightens, his breathing going ragged where his face is still pressed to the crook of Loki's neck. “Yes.”

Thor withdraws and panic blossoms in Loki's chest. Was that the wrong answer? Surely not.

He's left standing there, eyes burning. The blue of Thor's eyes is swallowed up with black, and he moves a hand down to cup the obvious bulge at his crotch, giving himself a squeeze that has Loki's entire body tingling. He wants to touch himself too, just to relieve a bit of the pressure but holds off. It will be Thor that touches him first.

Loki backs toward the bed, beckoning him with a crooked finger. Thor follows while shucking his shirt off to reveal all that tanned muscle. Sculpted, scarred, yet perfect. Rightfully glorified.

Loki licks his lips; he understands why the Aesir are called gods

“I’ve wanted you from the moment I saw you,” Thor says as Loki’s knees hit the bed and he falls back against it. He spreads his legs so that Thor may see just how bad he wants this too.

“Show me.”

A whimper escapes him when Thor rids himself of his breeches. Legs just as muscled as the rest of him, covered in fine, blonde hair. More than that, his hard cock, red and leaking, curved up toward his stomach. Loki’s stomach flips at the mere thought of that beast making its way inside him. He can already feel the stretch.

Thor comes to stand between Loki’s open legs, not close enough to touch. He’s on the verge of doing something truly pathetic, like begging. Hands come to rest on his thighs, fingers trailing up and down the soft skin. Loki begs with his body instead of his mouth, bucking his hips toward Thor in hopes he catches the hint.

“You’re so beautiful,” Thor says gently, much too tender for what Loki wants him to do. He brings his fingers to ghost lightly down the shaft of his cock, featherlight touches they do nothing but tease.

“You don’t have to flatter me,” Loki mutters out, his cheeks going purple all the same.

“Oh?” Thor asks, annoyingly humorous tilt to his voice. His fingers trail lower to trace the folds of his cunt, never touching enough to bring satisfaction. “What is it I need to do then?”

So, this was punishment.

Loki makes a futile attempt to grind his hips down so that he might feel any sort of friction. Thor smiles and pulls his hand out of reach and Loki groans, throwing his head back. He’s so turned on he could cry, and he very well may do just that.

“Touch me—“

A thick, rough finger eases inside and Loki nearly sees stars just from that. He finds himself gasping, chest heaving, struggling to lift his head enough to get a look at the display at the foot of the bed. Thor is watching him, coaxing a few more desperate moans from Loki’s lips as he works his finger in.

“Thor,” Loki pants. He will beg now, he needs more. “Please.”

Thor drops down and before Loki can wrap his head around what’s happening, his cock is taken in by the hot suction of Thor’s mouth.

Loki presses his hand to his face, so hard against his eyes that he sees stars. He’s embarrassingly close. If it weren’t for a heavy hand weighing down on one of his thighs, he’d be wrapping his legs around Thor’s neck, holding him in place until he comes.

Another finger slides along the other one, stretching him open so that he has to muffle the noises falling out of his mouth. It’s good, amazing— but Loki needs the real thing. He can almost picture it, Thor above him, pushing in, bending him in half to fuck with all the might Loki knows him to have. Claiming him, burying himself so deep inside that Loki would feel him with or without a

bond.

Thor buries his nose to the hilt when Loki comes, swallowing him down and fucking him with his fingers through the aftershocks; until he's too sensitive for anything else. Thor pulls out, and Loki can feel the wet drag of them on his skin. He feels satisfied, pliant, yet empty.

Perhaps satisfied is the wrong word, that will only come when he feels Thor properly inside him. Even release can't quell that feral need; to consume and be consumed.

"Come here," Loki murmurs. "Lay down."

He looks oddly young for a grown man wiping the evidence of Loki's orgasm from his mouth. It's as if he's afraid he'll be kicked out of the room, the palace, and finally, Jotunheim. Loki moves to make room, calling him with heavy eyes and promise for something better.

Idly, as he watches Thor get comfortable, Loki wonders how this will go. Will he take out Loki's transgressions in a brutal, punishing fuck? Or will he be sweet, loving, like Loki knows him to be?

He wants both, he wants all. If they are lucky, time won't be an issue and he'll let Thor fuck him any way he likes for the rest of their days.

"Are you tired?" Thor asks with an edge of hesitation.

Loki leans in to kiss him, hand rubbing against the bristle of his cheek. "No," he answers. "Not yet."

Tonight, he decides, he will fuck Thor how he pleases.

Thor lets out a soft grunt when Loki throws a leg over his waist, saddling himself atop his cock. The thickness of it spreads him. Loki ruts against him, aiming to make Thor unravel, only to find he's not immune. Arousal stirs again, and he pants with every slide until he can no longer handle it.

"I'm going to take care of you now," Loki tells him. Take care of both of them, really. Thor's been impossibly hard for a while now, there's no way this will last as long as either of them wants. Still, Loki finds it doesn't matter.

Thor wordlessly watches, gaze hungry and honed in as Loki lifts himself up. He guides himself down, shuddering through the breach and a stretch that burns until he's settled nicely, fully sheathed. There's already moisture beading at Thor's temples, his golden hair darkened by the shadows of night and dampness of sweat.

Beautiful, and his.

The first roll of his hips is nearly too much, and Loki plants his hands firmly on Thor's chest to brace himself, thumbing at his pert nipple just to get a low hiss. With leverage, Loki lifts his hips, sliding nearly out before dropping himself back down— *that* gets him more than a hiss.

"Loki," Thor growls, hands coming to grab his hips hard enough to bruise. He guides him into another thrust, and Loki goes willingly.

Why haven't they been doing this from the beginning? He has a hard time remembering with Thor buried so deep inside.

They find a rhythm this way, Thor pseudo-controlling Loki's movements as he bounces with gaining speed. It's more than he could have imagined, and soon he finds himself close to tumbling

back over the edge. The snap of his hips more erratic and the wordless gasps and moans turning to a chant of Thor's name over, and over, and over.

Thor lifts him with ease, holding him there while lifting his own hips to buck up in brutal thrusts, each drag of his cock hitting the spot that makes his vision go fuzzy at the edges.

"Come," Thor growls, never faltering in his quick movement. "One more time."

Oh, he may pass out before this is over.

Between Thor drilling into him, grunting and moaning like a beast, and all but commanding him to release, it's not a surprise that one tight fist around his own neglected cock has Loki spilling over his fingers and across Thor's chest.

The grip on his hips is almost painful, and Thor looks positively overwhelmed—bared teeth and flared nostrils, eyes zoned into where their bodies are locked. It's almost over, he feels Thor try to pull out but that's not what he needs.

"In me," Loki says, breaking free from his hold and grinding down. "Make me yours."

He is, in essence, Thor's already. But Loki still chokes out a sob when he feels Thor press into him a final time, warmth flooding every inch of him while Thor empties himself into his body. He could cry with relief but settles with collapsing onto Thor's heaving chest.

Loki isn't sure how much time passes. Minutes, hours, days. It doesn't matter. They lay together, sticking with sweat and remnants of their coupling. Disgusting really, if Loki wasn't feeling a bit romantic over it all.

Thor, in Jotunheim, and in his bed. He sighs, happy, and Thor stirs where he is trapped beneath Loki's weight.

"I know that you'll never truly belong to me."

Loki hums. Leave it to Thor to ruin the moment. "Of course. It's only a sentiment."

"No," Thor says, stern. Loki lifts his head to better see him; he looks too serious for what just transpired. "I never want you to feel caged."

Loki blinks, watching every minute detail of his expression; the twitch of his lip into a frown, the furrow of his brows. It's obvious the memories flooding him, chains and shackles, cells and restrictions. That all seems a lifetime ago.

Loki leans up to kiss him softly on the cheek.

"You couldn't cage me," he tells Thor. "Gold is much too soft."

Loki doubts Thor meant to spend the night in his frigid bedroom but keeping their hands off each other proves much too difficult. They pass hours touching and kissing, Thor working himself up

into another round— this time with Loki on his back and his legs hooked over Thor’s shoulders. Just as good as the first time, if not better.

It’s after Loki rises from bringing Thor off once again, this time with his clever mouth, that they finally lay back, too exhausted to do any more than pant up at the ceiling.

Never in his life has Loki felt more at home, and finds it has nothing to do with Jotunheim at all.

“I have to ask,” Thor says between gasping breaths. “How would that work between you and, you know.” He gestures vaguely to the door, but Loki doesn’t really need that many context clues to understand what he’s asking. Helblindi is huge, a frost giant in every regard.

“I have a cock, you know.” Loki is quite aware that Thor *does* know. His hands and tongue have detailed it very well. He rolls over to his side, facing Thor, walking his fingers down his chest. “I am very capable of fucking.”

Thor goes red, eyes automatically skirting down to Loki’s lap, where he sits soft and wrung out.

“I’ll show you one day,” Loki hums conversationally. “But not tonight.”

Thor lets out a breath of relief, and Loki laughs.

“So, do you mean when I visit Jotunheim again?”

Thor, so blissfully unaware. It’s endearing, if not aggravating.

“Do you know why I asked Helblindi to sleep with me tonight?” Loki sees him startle, but he only shakes his head in response. “I told him I was leaving.”

“Where are you going?” Thor asks, hopeful.

“Don’t be daft.”

Thor grins, a laugh bubbling out of him. It’s contagious, for Loki laughs too. They turn toward each other, side-by-side, and meet each other for a slow kiss.

Loki pulls back, smiles against his lips, and tells him, “I’m going home.”

Chapter End Notes

i know these last few chapters have come out slower than the rest, but thank you for having patience with me! i had a busy week with vacation and adjusting to coming back to classes and work. one more chapter, ya'll! <3

final act

Chapter Summary

final act: **how**

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The feast is lurid and packed too tightly. It's hard to tell who is genuinely happy he's there, who is too drunk to care, and who is watching with plotting eyes, waiting for the perfect opportunity to strike. Thor stays close beside him, hand wrapped around his waist to keep him close and safe.

Loki closes his eyes and brings his goblet to his lips, sweet wine going down bitter.

He could have done without the party, but he realizes this is just how Asgardians celebrate and welcome. That's fine, the night is drawing ever-closer to dawn, and soon it will be over and soon he'll be back in bed with Thor.

That thought is enough to warm him up.

Upon his arrival back to the Golden Realm, they spent most of their days tumbling in the sheets. And, not just the sheets— anywhere Thor could get his hands on him, or vice versa. It's been a tiring, exhilarating two weeks, but Loki's grown enough to admit his body is tired and sore. Thor, however, seems to have enough stamina for both of them and that's fine. Loki is more than content to lay back and let him service.

"Having a good time?" Thor asks into the shell of his ear. His breath smells of honeyed mead, but Loki doesn't turn away.

"Yes." Loki smiles at him and Thor returns it before he turns back to his conversation. His smile drops and he stares into his half-empty cup.

It's not the truth, but Loki only tells white lies now. Little things to save feelings.

He doesn't tell Thor that sometimes he misses Jotunheim and his brother; or that sometimes he's afraid the novelty of their relationship will wane, and he will be cast aside; or that the people of Asgard will never accept him fully. Or— that Thor will take a wife, a proper one; one that wasn't once known as a betrayer to the realm.

They haven't discussed the nature of...well, whatever is, or *isn't*, going on between them.

They had sex and a lot of it. But Thor only confesses his love while buried deep to the hilt. In the times where they are alone, yet clothed and casual, Thor watches him with a worried eye. He touches and smiles, but he hesitates.

He's afraid of something, and in turn, so is Loki.

He's afraid that Thor will realize his mistake, or that Odin may wake up and warp Thor's mind. Though— he's been assured that the old bastard is one foot into Valhalla, and it won't be long until

Loki can watch him sail off in a flaming boat while pretending to mourn.

And even so, if he did happen to wake, Thor is King.

Really, this time.

Unless this is all another very unclever performance.

Not likely— but there is definitely a performance going on, regardless, Loki thinks.

He can't count the number of men and women who have approached him to give him a hearty slap on the back or clumsy, drunk curtsy. Each offer of comradery or adoration is lost on him; and every time, Loki finds himself looking to Thor for an explanation.

Thor, of course, has already explained this to him.

"In your absence, I told the people the truth— of Asgard, of the war, of you. We have been deprived of an understanding and the truth of your people for centuries. Yes, you came here and essentially stole from the royal family, but you did so to save your home. It was honorable, brave, and selfless. You could have been slain where you stood, yet you risked it all the same— all to give your people a chance that we had stolen from you. This is admirable in the eyes of Asgard. They see you as a hero."

Honorable. Brave. Selfless. *Hero*. He's not sure any of that is true, but Thor must be able to weave stories as remarkable as his own if that's the case.

Loki had dropped to his knees right there while Thor pulled his hair and horn and called him much more lewd names, ones that make his knees quake to remember.

Thor assured him that while there would always be people hung up on their prejudices and loyalty to his father, he would always be safe in Asgard.

Loki's pulled from his tipsy, melancholy musings by a tug on his hand.

"Let's catch some fresh air."

"Yes," Loki says a bit breathless. That sounds wonderful. "Please."

He lets Thor lead them through the crowd as they part to make way. The air is infinitely lighter outside the banquet, and Loki fills his lungs.

"You know, you don't have to lie to me," Thor says with a wry smile. He keeps his hold on Loki's hand, tugging him closer as they wall the empty hall. The archways let in the pale moonlight. It's familiar, the cool tones and dark shadows.

"I would never." Loki tries for scandalized, but it only makes Thor laugh. He's always pleased when he does that—it's a very nice sound, after all.

"You looked absolutely miserable! I'm sure the minstrel will drown himself in tears tonight. You didn't even crack a smile at his song of your triumphs."

Loki blinks. Was there a song? He hadn't noticed, too sucked up in his own mind that was filled to the brim with hypotheticals. Thor doesn't seem angry though, more amused, like he fully anticipated Loki's indifference to song and dance.

"I'm sure it was lovely," Loki tells him with pursed lips. In truth, if he had known it was about

him, he may have paid attention. He was still a vain creature at times.

“It was dreadful,” Thor says, and Loki buries his face a strong arm to muffle his laughter.

He likes this. It’s easy. Just the two of them.

“Where are you taking me?” Loki asks after some time. The corridor looks familiar, achingly so—but he hasn’t been paying attention.

Thor doesn’t answer him, only smiles and they keep walking until they can’t anymore. Until they are at a large archway overlooking Asgard bathed in the nightfall. He’s been here before, with Thor, a long time ago.

“I have something for you.”

“Oh? A party and a gift?” Loki’s proud the trembling of his heart doesn’t reach his lips. “Why Thor, it’s not my birthday for another three months,” he finishes with great sarcasm.

Thor shakes his head, a fondness on his lips as he takes Loki’s hand in his and brings it to his mouth, kissing the knuckles before digging in his pocket. Thor slips something onto his finger and Loki notices that his hands are shaking too.

Loki’s almost afraid to look down because he knows what it is.

And when he does, finding himself correct, he still lets out a small sob.

The fire opal ring, the one his parted brother gave him in his youth— no longer on a string and no longer too small for his hand.

“Thor,” Loki chokes through the welling tears.

It’s so painfully thoughtful, he doesn’t know what else to do.

“There’s something else.”

His gaze shoots up to find Thor looking at him the way he sometimes does, that mix of worry and hope. Loki looks back down at the ring set on his finger. His— *oh*.

If it were possible for a heart to break a ribcage, his surely would.

“I had a perfect speech planned but,” Thor swallows and his hand tightens were they hold Loki’s. “Marry me?”

Perfectly eloquent, of course. But Loki can’t be troubled with that. He lets out a half-laugh, half-sob.

“You don’t want to do that,” he says. He braces himself for a hurt, disappointed look from Thor—but it never comes.

Loki hopes, selfishly, that he does want that. Deep down, he knows he does. But it will be complicated, and it will be hard. Loki is a force of his own, but Thor is the storm. Opposed they can cause great damage, they’ve proven that. But, together...

“I do,” Thor tells him. “In fact, I’ve thought about it a lot.”

Loki sighs in relief.

“So have I.”

Thor grins, chuckling to himself, he holds Loki’s hand to his heart. The ring glints in the moonlight.

“And, what did you think about saying?” Thor's grin is confident on the surface, but Loki can see his insecurity edging through. "Will you marry me, Prince Loki of Jotunheim?"

He's thought about saying many things. So, so many things.

How he wishes he had done things differently. How he wishes he had called his feelings for what they were in the very beginning. How he'll never be able to forget their past mistakes, though he will try to forgive. How he’s tried to figure out when it happened— when he first loved him— and how he’s concluded it was the day he walked into the throne room and first laid eyes on the False-King. And how he never wants to be without him, it’s far too painful a thought. How even with the bond severed, his heart is still connected. How he knows Thor will never cage him, not again. How he loves him. *He loves him.*

He doesn’t say any of that, there will be time. Only—

“Yes.”

Chapter End Notes

it's over! :) i promised you a happy ending. though, really, it's a happy beginning!

thank you so much to everyone who has read and commented and bookmarked and given kudos. the response to this story was so overwhelming! i never expected it! and i can't tell you how happy it's made me. i'm trying to develop myself as a writer, and your constant support was the best motivation i could ask for. so really, from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

<3

i love you all.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!